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Sheikh Yassin, portrait of the week by Bahgory 10

No time-out

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak insisted yesterday that Israel should honour its commitments and carry out a second military redeployment in the West Bank, reports Nevine Khalil.

Mubarak, during a visit to Beni Suef to inaugurate a newly-discovered oil well, was asked whether the US had proposed "time-out" on the construction of Jewish settlements in return for delaying the redeployment. "I don't believe so," Mubarak responded. "The redeployment agreement was signed last January and must be implemented. If we talk about delaying it now, this would be an incomprehensible game... The failure to keep promises will only breed suspicion."

Mandela visit

SOUTH African President Nelson Mandela will arrive in Cairo on Monday for a two-day visit to Egypt that will include talks with President Hosni Mubarak.

Mandela will also visit Libya on his way to a Commonwealth summit in Edinburgh, Scotland, from 24 to 27 October.

Jihad ruling

A MILITARY court yesterday sentenced three Jihad militants to death, two of them in their absence, and 53 others to imprisonment on charges of planning assassinations and bombings. The court acquitted 31 suspects.

Among the 53 sent to prison, two were jailed for life and the others got prison terms ranging from one year to 15 years of hard labour.

Those condemned to death in absentia were fugitives Adel Abdel-Meguid and Ibrahim El-Sayed El-Naggar who were convicted of sending money to Egypt to revive Jihad's underground, anti-government activities.

Adel El-Soudani received a death sentence for packing a car with explosives to blow up Cairo's bazaar district of Khan El-Khalili, which is a tourist attraction.

US summit?

ISRAELI Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu will visit the United States in November prompting speculation of a three-way summit in Washington with Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and US President Bill Clinton.

But in Washington, US State Department Spokesman James Rubin said he was "not aware" of plans for such a meeting.

INSIDE

Unity or conspiracy?

Graham Usher writes from Jerusalem on the tangled web enmeshing Arafat, King Hussein and Sheikh Ahmed Yassin

When Binyamin Netanyahu and Yasser Arafat met "secretly" last week, the discussion centred less on the stalled Oslo process than on the repercussions for both men of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin's triumphant return to Gaza. The consensus reached appears to have been that each leader needed to be strengthened.

Describing the meeting as "good", Arafat instructed his intelligence forces to renew bilateral "security cooperation" with Israel. For his part, Netanyahu reportedly agreed to release $50 million of taxes, withheld from the Palestinian Authority (PA) as punishment for recent suicide bombings, as well as relaxing the blockade of the Occupied Territories. There are signs too of possible agreement on opening the Palestinian airport in Gaza.

For Netanyahu, the main worry is whether Yassin will use his considerable authority to sanction or discourage suicide attacks on Israeli civilians. For Arafat, the concern is less the fact of Yassin's presence in Gaza than the circumstances which brought it about.

It is no secret that Arafat was furious over the way Fatah was out-manoeuvred by King Hussein, Israel and (suspect Fatah) Hamas in the various deals that traded Yassin for the repatriation of six Mossad agents to Israel. At a closed meeting of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) on 8 October, an outraged Arafat reportedly accused Jordan "of trying to create a base for itself in the West Bank via the Hamas movement", a scenario which Palestinians "will never accept."

Arafat's fears may be exaggerated, but they are not groundless. Since 1967, King Hussein and the PLO have fought a long turf war for political control of the Occupied Territories, a tussle that appeared to end in Arafat's favour in 1988 when the king renounced all claims on the West Bank.

No one seriously believes that King Hussein intends to challenge Arafat for the stewardship of the Palestinian cause. But there remain suspicions that the King may be drawing on his strong ties with Jordan's Islamist movement and, possibly, with Hamas, as future insurance on the West Bank should Oslo, Arafat and the PA one day fall apart.

Whatever the motive, it is clear that in the wake of the "Misha'al affair" it was the king (and not Arafat) who came out on top. Astutely exploiting Netanyahu's embarrassment, the king not only secured Yassin's return to Gaza but also the release of 70 other political prisoners. This is especially galling for Arafat who, for four years, has been unable to win the freedom of 3,000 Palestinian prisoners.

To make matters worse, Jordan's main interlocutor in brokering these deals was none other than Israel's infrastructure minister, Ariel Sharon. For Palestinians, Sharon is known not only as the architect of Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, but also as the leading Israeli advocate of the idea that "Jordan is Palestine." Sharon's warm ties with the Jordanian regime could not contrast more with his loathing of Arafat.

But what really rankles the PA is the political status the king has conferred on the Hamas leadership in Jordan, seen as the "most hostile" of all Hamas' various wings to Palestinian nationalism. Despite denials to the contrary, Fatah is convinced that Hamas in Jordan had a hand in the various negotiations that brought about Yassin's release and so were complicit in enhancing the king's stature in Palestinian eyes at the expense of Arafat and the PA. The belief is reinforced by Jordanian and Israeli reports that it was the Jordan based Hamas leader, Musa Abu Marzuq, who proposed that King Hussein serve as "mediator" for the cease-fire offer Hamas allegedly made to Israel two days before Mossad tried to kill Misha'al.

If true, Hamas' overture amounts to a calculated slap in the face to Arafat and his claim that only the PLO can represent the Palestinian people. "It is unacceptable for Hamas to be seen to enjoy close relations with Jordan or any other Arab country and bad relations with the PA," says Fatah's West Bank secretary-general, Marwan Barghouti.

With Yassin's return to Gaza, the recriminations abated a little. Yassin vowed to "make every effort" to strengthen ties with the PA. He has also insisted that "any dialogue with the Israeli government must be carried out through the Palestinian regime," and that "there never has been nor ever will be direct negotiations between Hamas and Israel."

It was the pledge Arafat most wanted to hear. In response, the PLO leader paid a high profile visit to Yassin on 7 October and, say sources, promised to release around 90 Hamas activists from PA jails and reopen the 16 Islamic charities the PA recently closed. Arafat also worked to ease relations with Jordan, dispatching PLC speaker, Ahmed Qrei, to meet with Jordan's prime minister, Abdel-Salam Al-Majali, on 11 October. "Brotherly," is how Qrei described relations with Jordan.

Fatah-Hamas relations are less fraternal, though both movements appear to want to use Yassin's return to rejuvenate the Palestinian national dialogue. For this to succeed, says Barghouti, the PA must end its persecution of Hamas activists and institutions. But, he adds, Hamas also "has to make a historical decision. It must accept the Palestinians strategic choice for peace and recognise the PA as the only national authority in Palestine." Does he fear that Hamas may still be tempted to play Jordan off against the PA and perhaps both against Israel? "I think there is still that danger, yes," says Barghouti. (see p.4)

photo: Sherif Sonbol

Steel ladders to paradise

David Blake discovers that, as far as this week's spectacular performance of *Aida* in Luxor is concerned, it remains not just less tough at the top but positively balmy

The bus holds a conglomerate of pilgrims and supplicants, from Los Angeles, Sydney, Australia, Sussex, England. This bus, and a fleet of others like it, bring an international crowd, including the strange sight, in this place, of Scotsmen in kilts, alongside plain individuals. And everyone merges into the horde — thousands, making their way, at this hour of sunset, across the Nile to Deir El-Bahari and the justly celebrated Temple of Hatshepsut.

They are heading for an event, and the event is "Operaida", the term coined by the man in the street for what is, perhaps, Verdi's most famous work. Operaida — it is a useful portmanteau word for what has become, over the years, an event rather than a person, or even a performance.

Everyone will be there, or at least watching the excerpts on the television. Attending in person, President Hosni Mubarak and his wife. It is Mrs Suzanne Mubarak who has sponsored this particular event, an event — the Luxor production of *Aida* — that is fast becoming a part of local folklore.

Such spectacular productions, and the surrounding media jamboree, afford a perfect opportunity for spreading a feeling for opera to people for whom it is now little more than a joke. And if events like this can help fill the Opera House in Cairo, then the president and his wife will have done a job considered almost impossible by the musical pundits of the establishment.

And so the bus loads of opera addicts move through the streets of Luxor to the place of consummation, an immense structure of steel girders, a Kafkaesque dream castle, the open-air arena in which this *Aida* will be performed.

Luxor looks marvelous as the buses glide along through the city streets towards the magic mountain that dominates for miles around. There is a lot of Nile here — could it ever be wider? — and a lot of mountain. Luxor has become a city of trees, arching over the sidewalks, providing a lesson for other cities in pedestrian comfort. There is a feeling of fantasia in the air. The police are in white, the officers white-gloved, lending an appropriately operatic touch to the proceedings.

These performances have been planned to celebrate two dates, the 125th anniversary of the first performance of Verdi's work at the old Cairo Opera House, and the 75th anniversary of the discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamun in the Valley of the Kings. Yet there is nothing reverential, nothing set in aspic about the atmosphere. Luxor, a small city by most standards, has always had a sense of movement, and this year's performances of *Aida* are being managed as if to the manner born. A festival show is good for everyone and the townspeople appear to be taking it in their stride.

The big white buses halt by the river. The pontoon bridge has been reached. Only a fixed number of vehicles can cross at any one time and so we wait our turn. We nose down the bank, bump over the bridge, and then we are there, careering through the exciting West Bank site.

The view is positively Venetian, the water smooth, though with a bridge of lights rather than sighs. We are treated royally. Big lights, on long, plant like stems, shroud the road with a golden glow.

The sun sets, its afterglow illuminating the whole scene with a luminous, tan velvet light. The road to the Temple of Hatshepsut is lined with policemen, some of whom hold aloft long, gently glowing lozenge shaped lights. The effect is at once beautiful and disturbing.

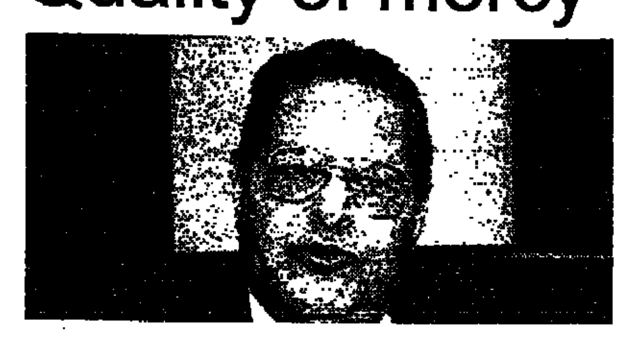
Night descends. And everything fits, for *Aida* is, above all else, an opera of the night. The villages we pass are objects in a painting. This place, the landscape hereabouts, has a remarkable gift for personality change, a talent to suggest not just other places but other times. It is only the passing of time that seems permanent here.

And then we halt as out of the bus pile the crowds who are seeking both knowledge and sound. Soon we will climb the steel face of the theatre mountain, ascending to the heights from which we will see *Aida*. Stars, from both heaven and earth are shining. Egypt has done her magic, and now it is time for Verdi to do his.

And from the top of the steel construction the view is as perfect as it can be. The overture begins. The music floats up to where we are sitting, way, way up in the gods, and a cast of thousands prepares, somewhere out of sight, to make its entrance. (see p.13)

Obituary

Quality of mercy



Praised by Muslims and Christians alike as a pioneer of both charity work and religious tolerance, Bishop Samuel Habib has passed away. **Samia Abdennour** and **Amira Howeidy** look back on a life on the front line

After 45 years promoting social and development work and fighting illiteracy, Bishop Samuel Habib, head of the Coptic Evangelical Church and a long-term advocate of dialogue between religions, died in the United States of a heart attack on 7 October. He was 69.

His funeral last Saturday was a unique scene of national unity. 2,000 people gathered to pay their last respects to one of Egypt's most eminent and popular men of religion, including leaders from all the Christian churches in Egypt, Al-Azhar and Al-Azhar University, the Higher Council for Islamic Affairs, political parties and NGOs, as well as the Mufti of the Republic and the Supreme Guide of the outlawed Muslim Brotherhood.

Bishop Habib, an ordained minister with honourary doctorates in divinity, law and peacemaking from universities in the United States and Canada, published over 50 books dealing mainly with development, many of which were translated into other languages. He was elected head of the Coptic Evangelical Church in 1980. Apart from theology, he was also trained in journalism and social services. In recognition of his outstanding efforts in the field of education, Habib was named in 1990 by an American association as one of the world's three principal pioneers in combating illiteracy.

Social work was his chief concern. The gigantic Coptic Evangelical Organisation for Social Services (CEOSS) which he established in 1952 is, to many, his most important legacy.

CEOSS was founded on the strength of $12,999 a year donated by the US National Council of Churches and $30,000 a year (for three years) from the US Women's Guild of the Presbyterian Church. It has grown into one of the largest development agencies in the Middle East, now serving more than two million Christians and Muslims nation-wide each year.

Initially, Habib's aim was to combat illiteracy in rural communities. He owed the inspiration for the outlines of his campaign from the American-based Frank C. Laubach Movement. This movement had invited organisations from 70 countries around the world each to develop its own method for combatting illiteracy. A comprehensive study would then be made of the success of all the different proposals, to be distributed for review and as a possible source of guidance.

Before plunging headlong into the campaign, Habib took time off to acquaint himself with the economic and social conditions of Egypt's rural communities. He wanted to study peasants' lives and find out whether they were interested in literacy programmes. His first choice of locale for his experiment was Hirz, a small village in Minya Governorate which has an all-Christian population of about 1,000.

The village's poverty shocked him. Illiteracy was definitely not the only major problem; poverty and poor hygiene also required prompt remedies. Other villages with an all-Muslim population revealed similar conditions.

What started out as a literacy campaign developed into a wider programme for integrated development. The organisation's activities multiplied further with the facilities afforded by President Anwar El-Sadat's open-door policy and Hosni Mubarak's reforms. Agriculture, education, health and technical services were all integrated into the programme.

Helped by his wife, Fawziya, Habib set out to train young men and women to act as leaders in rural communities. He encouraged them to further their training, either locally or abroad. Their job as he saw it was to help the communities solve their social problems and implement the projects.

Samuel Habib played a major role in making religious tolerance a reality in the world of social services. Realising the importance of joint work between the mosque and the church, he encouraged and supported another unique project, founded in 1991, which aims to bring together Islamic and Christian traditions of charity. An example of its work is the Alexandria Coptic Evangelical Church social project, that is run in collaboration with an adjacent mosque. The street separating the two buildings is now known as El-Mahaba Street, the street of love.

In 1995, Habib made a celebrated journey to the US together with the Grand Mufti, Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, now the Grand Sheikh of Al-Azhar. Their aim was to present a better image of Islam to the West. Both men were awarded honourary "peace" doctorates from Westminster University in Pennsylvania.

The bishop is survived by a son, Dr Rafiq Habib, a social researcher and leading activist at the CEOSS, who recently joined with former members of the Muslim Brotherhood in a failed attempt to establish a centrist political party by the name of Al-Wasat.

Cairo and Delhi inch even closer

Meeting in the Egyptian capital, President Mubarak and India's Prime Minister Gujral have pledged to strengthen the already close ties between their two countries, writes **Gamal Nkrumah**

By all accounts, talks between President Hosni Mubarak and Indian Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral would seem to have been as friendly as they were fruitful. The talks touched on a number of issues, including permanent seats for the two countries on the UN Security Council; Afghanistan; India's ongoing dialogue with Pakistan for the improvement of relations between the two South Asian neighbours; the forthcoming G15 summit meeting in Malaysia; and the need to revamp the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Kashmir was not on the agenda.

Ambassador Sayed Abu Zeid Omar, assistant foreign minister for asian affairs, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the talks were "fruitful and frank." After meeting with President Mubarak on Saturday morning, Gujral visited the Monument of the Unknown Soldier and the tomb of the late President Anwar El-Sadat where he placed two wreaths of flowers. According to Omar, Mubarak briefed Gujral about the faltering Middle East peace process and the prime minister affirmed India's support for the Palestinian cause.

The two leaders agreed that Mubarak would visit India in the near future, but no firm date was set for the visit. He will, however, be meeting with Gujral during the G15 summit next month. This is the second time in as many years that an Indian prime minister has visited Egypt. Narasimha Rao visited in December 1995.

India and Egypt are both keen to increase bilateral economic cooperation and a group of experts, businessmen and officials is to be formed, tasked with finding ways of promoting trade between the two countries. They are also to identify important joint ventures which could be launched in the near future. In his discussions with Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, Gujral stressed the importance of boosting the commercial and economic relations between the two countries.

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, who attended Saturday's meeting, said that both Mubarak and Gujral want to expand bilateral cooperation. "Both sides want to boost bilateral contacts in order to restore their historic relationship," he said. Egypt and India, along with Yugoslavia, are the founding members of the NAM.

Although bilateral issues dominated Gujral's discussions with Mubarak, Ganzouri and Moussa, a number of international issues of mutual concern were also touched upon. On the question of seats for India and Egypt on the UN Security Council, Egypt reiterated its position that it is open to suggestions about a rotating seat for the African continent, while India stressed that it wanted a permanent seat for itself. The two countries were in agreement that there must be more seats for developing countries and that the reform of the UN General Assembly must also be seriously addressed.

"We cannot support the so-called 'quick picks' by letting two countries from the north join without a comprehensive agreement," said Moussa, in reference to the proposal to let Japan and Germany become permanent members in advance of a package deal for the rest of the UN member-states.

"We agree that there is no reason to rush," Moussa continued. "We have to take our time so that the enlargement and reform of the Security Council should be by consensus and will meet the needs, requirements and interests of both North and South."

Moussa added that the two leaders "touched upon" India's opposition to a global treaty banning nuclear tests. "India has had meetings with the nuclear countries who are asking India to join the ban, and who yet continue to carry out tests of their own," Moussa said. "This is what has led to India's doubts on this score."

During the visit, Egypt and India signed a number of agreements, the most important of which was an agreement intended to promote wide-scale cooperation between them in the field of tourism. The agreement provides for cooperation between the official tourism organisations of both countries with a view to promoting tourist exchange.

An agreement on mutual assistance and cooperation in relation to customs barriers was also signed. The aim of this agreement "is to strengthen and widen the existing links of friendship and cooperation between India and Egypt," Indian Ambassador Kanwal Sibal told the *Weekly*. "Offences against customs law are prejudicial to the economic and commercial interests of both countries, and there is a pressing need for accurate assessment of customs duties and proper enforcement of customs laws," he added.



India's Prime Minister Gujral

'I did it for God'

The 'madman' who bombed a tourist bus in Tahrir Square last month told reporters at the opening of his trial that he embraces the ideology of the underground Jihad group. **Shaden Shehab** attended

Saber Farahat, who escaped from a mental hospital last month to attack German tourists, told reporters at the opening of his trial on Tuesday that he wanted "to have the honour" of killing hundreds of Jews.

Declaring that he supported the ideology of the underground Jihad group, Farahat, 32, said from behind bars that he decided to attack the Germans because "they are all infidels, all of one kind."

Farahat and his brother, Mahmoud, fire-bombed a tourist bus outside the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir Square on 18 September, killing nine German holidaymakers and the Egyptian driver. The pair used revolvers and Molotov cocktails during the attack in broad daylight. They were captured immediately afterwards.

The military trial of the Farahat brothers and seven accomplices, who allegedly provided them with weapons, opened on Tuesday and is set to resume on Saturday.

During the brief procedural session, the judge called the defendants' names and inquired whether they had defence attorneys. Saber responded that he wanted to defend himself. His request denied, Saber asked the court to appoint a lawyer for him. His brother made the same request.

The lawyers for the accomplices asked the court to order a medical examination of their clients to ensure that they were not ill-treated in jail.

The judge then read out the charges against the Farahat brothers and the accomplices. The two brothers were accused of premeditated murder, attacking tourists and harming the national economy by resorting to violence and terrorism. The charges are punishable by the death penalty. The others were charged with providing the pair with weapons and primitive bomb-making technology.

Before the opening of hearings, Saber Farahat told reporters that he supported the ideology of Jihad, although he was not a member of the clandestine anti-government group. Jihad was officially blamed for the assassination of the late President Anwar El-Sadat in October 1981.

Appearing in high spirits, Saber said that he had hoped the targets of the attack were Jews. "I wanted to have the honour of killing hundreds of Jews because this is worth a lot," he said, apparently meaning it would make headlines. Nonetheless, he decided to kill the Germans because "they are all infidels, all of one kind."

He said he did not want to kill the driver. "I told him several times not to move but, because he did not obey, I was forced to kill him," Saber said. He had spared the life of a tourist guide, by simply hitting him on the back of the head with a pistol and throwing him out of the bus.

Saber said he carried out the attack to avenge the action of an Israeli woman who had distributed posters in the West Bank depicting the Prophet Mohamed as a pig.

"I wish I could have gotten to her," Saber said. Head-shaven, he wore a prison outfit consisting of an open-neck beige T-shirt and trousers. His brother was dressed in a similar outfit but the other defendants wore white *galabiyas*.

Unlike the other defendants, who shunned the photographers' cameras, Saber posed smiling in front of them. His brother raised his forefinger, shouting the Islamic credo: "There is no god but God and Mohamed is His prophet."

Another reason for the attack, Saber said, was to hit tourism and embarrass the government. "I decided upon this timing because tourism was doing very well. Tourism is the government's lifeline. This is why it was my target." He said he and his brother planned the attack a month earlier.

Saber was first apprehended on 27 October 1993 after he opened fire on a group of foreigners inside the coffee-shop of the Semiramis Hotel. Two Frenchmen and an American were killed and another American, a Syrian and an Italian were wounded. In carrying out this attack, Saber said he was "convinced that he was undertaking a martyr's action." He was influenced by the war in Bosnia where Muslims were coming under fierce attacks from Christian Serbs. "I wanted to go to Bosnia at the time but was unable to," he said.

Saber was never put on trial at the time because an examination by psychiatrists at the government Abbasiya mental hospital, headed by hospital director Dr Sayed El-Qott, confirmed that he was schizophrenic. Consequently, he was confined to the El-Khanka mental hospital as of 27 January 1994.

The investigation into the bus attack revealed that Saber used to bribe doctors and nurses at the El-Khanka hospital to allow him to leave and return at his own free will. Nine doctors and nurses are facing trial before a civilian court.

Saber confirmed to reporters what he earlier told his interrogators, namely, that his father paid Dr El-Qott LE50,000 to get him certified mentally ill following the Semiramis attack. He said they could afford the money because his family owned a bakery and traded in flour and dates. Saber assured the reporters that he was not mad. Authorities had initially described Saber as a "mentally deranged" man who escaped from a mental hospital to carry out the bus attack.

Saber had earlier attempted a career as a singer, but his first and only album failed miserably. Following this, Saber said, he became more oriented towards religion and had the idea of "carrying out revenge against the infidels."

Asked how he acquired training in the use of fire-arms, Saber said he gained some experience when he was briefly drafted into the army, adding that since he hailed from Upper Egypt, "it is natural for me to know how to use guns."

Asked if he was afraid of a possible death sentence, Saber responded: "I am not afraid of dying. The companions of the Prophet advocated martyrdom. I was prepared to die in Tahrir Square, so it does not make any difference. I did this for God."

Saber, who got married during one of his flights from hospital, said that he had been informed that his wife was pregnant. If this is true, he said he hoped his son "would participate in the liberation of Jerusalem."

Family members who were absent from the trial had earlier told reporters that he once attempted to strangle his mother and, on another occasion, attempted to set their home ablaze by exploding a butane gas cylinder. Saber riposted that they were lying.

Mahmoud, 24, told reporters he had "no regrets." He said that he was simply responsible for acquiring the weapons and ammunition. He got them from two accomplices, Ahmed Guindi and Habib Iskandar. The others are innocent, he said.

Saber and Mahmoud Farahat

photo: Tony Faris

Warnings of a Mideast explosion

Another Middle East war is likely, warned a group of political experts who gathered in Cairo this week to review the Arab Strategic Report. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** attended

At the conclusion of a two-day conference discussing the Arab Strategic Report, Arab political experts warned that the Middle East was teetering on the brink of yet another explosion, as the peace process faced its worst deadlock in years.

The 300-page report, issued by the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, comprised five chapters dealing with the Arab world and the new world order, assessing foreign intervention in the region, and summarising the stalemate situation in the peace process. The last two chapters focused on Egypt's internal affairs, with analyses of the content of the president's speeches over the past year, the cabinet reshuffle, and Egypt's foreign and defence policies.

A group of around 20 political experts gathered at Cairo University's Centre for Political Research to review the report, but their discussions were overshadowed by the current deadlock in the peace process which prompted one speaker to call on all Arabs to prepare for what he termed "impending war."

Also under discussion was the Middle East/North Africa economic conference scheduled for November in Doha, and economic growth in the Arab countries over the last year.

The report lashed out at what it described as America's double-standard foreign policy, which "fosters an impression that while Israeli violence against Palestinians is generally acceptable as an expression of a security-oriented policy, Palestinian violence is treated as terrorism that undermines the peace process."

Cairo University's Professor Ahmed Youssef commented: "Many events which took place during the previous year entirely confirm the double standard accusation, so much so that it is unlikely that if the identities of victim and culprit were reversed, the international response would have been any different."

A similar view was put forward by Hasssan Abu Taleb of the Ahram Centre, who said that in the cases of both Serbia and Iraq, a different set of principles were applied after the cessation of hostilities.

"In the first case, sanctions were rapidly lifted and the situation restored to normal in Serbia, whereas Iraq was subjected to intensive intervention and continues to suffer under the yoke of sanctions, even though they are causing great suffering and loss of life in the poorest sectors of Iraqi society," Abu Taleb said.

In the words of Abdel-Moneim Said, the Ahram Centre's director, the report exposed some of the challenges the Arab world has to meet in the 1990s.

"The Arabs are faced with a multi-faceted challenge: globalisation and a confrontational environment in which talk of war prevails," Said said. He also pointed to the problem of overpopulation as one of the main factors leading to "a generation of young men unable to find jobs, and who may resort to violence and extremism, thus disturbing the balance between society and state."

Abu Taleb said the report drew a bleak picture of Arab policy, portraying it as a passive actor on the world stage, whereas Israel, represented by the Zionist lobby, has been able to influence elections in the United States and Russia.

"Everywhere we look, Israel rears its head in world politics, while the year 1996 witnessed the failure of the Arabs to act coherently in the context of the international organisations," Abu Taleb said.

Mohamed Sid-Ahmed spoke of an "in-built division between the Arabs." "The Arabs cannot be united when it comes to Turkey and Iran," he said. "While Syria rejects any anti-Iran bloc, the Gulf states maintain the opposite position."

On relations between the Arab world and both Turkey and Iran, the report used strong language to criticise Turkey for signing a military cooperation agreement with Israel, and lashed out at the two countries for pursuing "goals that are hostile to Arab interests." On a more pragmatic note, the speakers said that the Arab world had no option but to maintain good relations with both countries, as this will strengthen the Arab negotiators' position in the peace process.

One of the report's chapters analyses the political speeches of the president during the past year, coming to the conclusion that the bulk of his message was centered on the crisis in the peace process.

"Before [Prime Minister Binyamin] Netanyahu's rise to power, the president's speeches reflected optimism for the future of the peace process, but this optimistic tone changed drastically after Netanyahu's election. Then, the majority of the president's statements were intended to warn against the deterioration of the process," the report said.

Other topics addressed by the president were terrorism, economic reform and the New Delta project.

The subjects that dominated the front pages and editorials of most newspapers were corruption, the performance of the recently appointed government of Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, and terrorism.

The report published the results of a poll of 180 white-collar professionals, including journalists and university professors. The majority expressed dissatisfaction with the performance of the Egyptian multi-party system, describing it as "a bad experience", since the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) does not accept the principle of rotation of power with the other political parties.

"All political parties, including the NDP, lack a strong grass-roots base, and work for the interests of their own leaders rather than for the national interest," the report said.

It added in conclusion: "Government actions during the 1995 elections, which amounted to election-rigging in some areas, have prompted Egyptians to lose faith in the government and discouraged them from participating in political activities."

Violence in Minya

SUSPECTED members of the underground Al-Gama'a Al-Islamiya killed nine policemen and two civilians in two separate attacks on Monday in the southern province of Minya. The attacks claimed the highest casualty toll since July when the group's jailed leaders urged their followers to stop anti-government violence.

An Interior Ministry statement said unknown assailants opened fire Monday morning on a group of policemen in Hassouna village near Mallawi, killing three of them.

Shortly afterwards, according to the same statement, the police station in the town of Abu Qurqas received a report that the bodies of six policemen and two civilians, riddled with bullets, had been found.

Police investigation showed that the victims had been dragged by the militants from a passing car, tied up with ropes and then shot.

A man-hunt was immediately launched for the killers. Police have encircled a cultivated area near Mallawi, where the assailants involved in the first attack are believed to be hiding.

Accusing fingers were pointed at Farid Salem Kadwani, an escaped militant who is believed to be the Gama'a's provincial leader in Minya.

In July, a militant standing trial before a military court read out a statement on behalf of the group's jailed leaders, who urged their followers to halt anti-government attacks inside and outside Egypt. This initiative for a unilateral cease-fire was opposed, however, by the expatriate leaders of the Gama'a.

Monday's violence does not necessarily indicate that the assailants were in touch with Gama'a leaders abroad, analysts said, noting that it was almost impossible for the two sides to establish contact. But it does show that they were prepared to act in violation of the cease-fire call issued by the jailed leaders.

The attacks are the worst violence to have targeted policemen for almost two years, since ten policemen were killed when their vehicle was attacked by militants near Abu Qurqas.

Last February, gunmen stormed a church meeting in Abu Qurqas, killing nine people.







British armour coming ashore last Saturday along the northern coast to join Egyptian troops in establishing a beachhead and repulsing an "enemy" offensive photo: Mohamed El Qit

Biggest 'Bright Star' ever

Forces from Egypt, the US and five other countries are staging the largest military exercise ever held in the Middle East. **Galal Nassar** reports on the war games, and below, analyses their significance

In the largest war games ever staged in the Middle East, military forces from Egypt, the United States and five other countries will land from both sea and air to establish a beachhead along the northern coast and repulse a simulated offensive by "enemy" troops in the Western Desert. The exercise, code-named Bright Star-97, will involve forces from Britain, France, Italy, the United Arab Emirates [UAE] and Kuwait, in addition to Egypt and the United States. Twenty other countries are represented by observers.

In an initial phase of the exercise last Saturday, Egyptian and British mechanised infantry, backed by armoured vehicles, landed from two British craft in the Omayed area of the northern coast. As they worked to establish a beachhead, Egyptian, British and UAE reinforcements were dropped from the air. The two sets of forces then teamed up to prevent "enemy" forces from occupying the area of El-Alamein — scene of the famous World War II battle. They then launched a counter-offensive to repell the "enemy" troops and force them to withdraw.

Today, Alexandria will be the scene of an Italian-Egyptian "humanitarian assistance and disaster-relief" exercise. The scenario supposes that Alexandria's Daqhaliya harbour is hit by a devastating earthquake and the inhabitants of the area cannot be evacuated by civilian transport. The Italian amphibious craft San Marco, backed by a frigate with a crew of 700, will then come to their rescue.

The inhabitants are assembled in a makeshift camp and provided with medical assistance. Some of them will be evacuated by helicopters to the San Marco, where doctors will be waiting to perform "operations." The San Marco is equipped with operating rooms, 40 military transport vehicles and four combat aircraft. Egypt will contribute an 80-man military force to this relief exercise, as well as a team of doctors.

The commanders of the forces participating in Bright Star-97 will hold a news conference tomorrow at the Military Media Centre to announce the various arrangements, phases and objectives of the war games.

According to a military source, the exercise is divided into three phases. The first is an initial period of preparations and light training, which began on Saturday. The second phase, from 24 to 31 October, will mobilise the vast majority of the participating forces and bring the exercise to its peak intensity. The final phase, on 1-2 November, is a training programme for Egyptian and US military commanders.

The source said the participating forces will be divided into friendly forces ("green") and enemy forces ("orange").

The war games scenario calls for the "orange" forces to storm the western border and destroy the border posts as well as the limited forces stationed along the northern coast. In a counter-offensive, the "green" forces will land from sea and air to establish a beachhead and then advance to engage, and defeat, the "orange" forces. Warplanes will hit the "enemy's" command centres and air and naval bases. In their advance, the "green" forces will have to deal with air strikes by "orange" warplanes, as well as with the assumption that the "enemy" may use weapons of mass destruction.

"Green" paratroopers will be dropped behind "enemy" lines to occupy and secure "waiting areas." Electronic warfare methods, such as early warning, eavesdropping and jamming, will be fully deployed. Apache helicopters will be scrambled to strike at "orange" armoured vehicles and mechanised infantry as they come to the rescue. Commanders will have the opportunity to display their skill in using the desert terrain to pin-down the "enemy" within the area under occupation. Special forces will be required to engage in night combat to secure vital targets. Warplanes will be re-fueled in mid-air and air defence forces will engage attacking warplanes with surface-to-air missiles and anti-aircraft artillery.

According to the military source, one objective of the exercise is to improve the planning abilities of military commanders and provide them with experience in directing military operations jointly with friendly forces. Commanders should also acquire greater courage in decision-making because they will be allowed a free hand in running the combat operations. They will also gain experience in gathering and analysing information, determining actions on both tactical and strategic levels, and making camouflage plans.

Another objective of the exercise is to provide the land forces with training in carrying out reconnaissance operations, mounting rapid defence, confronting attacking forces, landing from the sea, staging obstructive combat actions, pinning down "enemy" forces, shifting from defence to attack, and fighting behind "enemy" lines.

A third objective is to provide the navy with training in transporting and landing military forces. Submarines will be required to search and destroy "enemy" vessels, protect the naval formation and detect sea-mines. The navy's special forces, who will be dropped from the air into the sea, will be provided with training in attacking and mining ships and ambushing "enemy" forces along coastal roads.

The air force will gain experience in carrying out reconnaissance operations and aerial photography, raiding "enemy" positions, aerial combat and interception, providing support to the land forces, dropping paratroopers and re-fueling in mid-air, as well as search and rescue.

The air defence forces will be provided with training in using early warning strategies, defending vital targets, particularly air bases and airports, and preventing any electronic jamming by the "enemy."

Third Army games

Although a large number of Egyptian troops are preoccupied with the Bright Star exercise, the Third Army began separate war games on Tuesday along the two banks of the Suez Canal in its southern sector.

The games, which were watched by chief-of-staff Lt. Gen. Magdi Hetata, featured artillery and helicopter strikes against "enemy" forces, followed by armoured and mechanised infantry units advancing to destroy the "enemy's" principal defences.

The advance was made under the hypothetical superiority of the "enemy's" air and electronic warfare power and its possible use of chemical weapons.

News analysis

Why joint training?

"History tells us that military weakness in one country frequently provides the incentive for a more militarily powerful country to wage war against it... Weakness is always an invitation to aggression. Every political stance must be backed by deterrent military power supported by a strong economy."

These were the words of President Hosni Mubarak during the celebrations commemorating the victory of 6th October. In his interview with the armed forces newspaper, in his speeches to the public on this occasion, and in his meetings with the commanders and men of the Second and Third Armies, President Mubarak dwelt on the meaning of military force as a means to protect peace. The idea of "slackening off the military" is not part of Egypt's vocabulary, he said.

The goal is progress and prosperity for the nation and its people, Mubarak stressed, outlining Egypt's "approach" towards these goals in terms of adopting "a course of political moderation in international relations, so as to secure peace, which in turn will safeguard the road to progress and prosperity, while developing a deterrent military capacity able to keep a vigilant watch over peace and stability."

The president's outlook was echoed by Field Marshall Hussein Tantawi, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and Minister of Defence, in *his speech to* Egyptian television on 6th October. Commenting on the recent manoeuvres of the Third Army, he said: "The Egyptian armed forces are the guarantee of peace. They protect the gains won by peace. The constant training of these forces in order to maintain their high standards of discipline and fighting capacity, the transmission of their military ... from one generation to the next, and the modernisation of our forces, are accorded the highest priority by the joint command of the armed forces."

In light of the political situation in the region, Egypt's political and military leadership believe that peace alone cannot meet Egypt's national security needs, and that there is a continuing need for a highly trained armed forces equipped with the latest military technology to serve as the primary safeguard of peace. It is for this reason that Egypt has engaged in major military manoeuvres such as Badr 93-96, a joint training exercise with the most technically advanced military academies in the US, Britain and France, and participated in international peacekeeping forces, as well as rescue operations in times of natural disaster.

Joint training exercises are seen by the Egyptian political and military leadership as an important instrument of advancing Egypt's national security interests. In direct military terms, they bring about an exchange of military expertise, open doors to marketing military hardware and enhance military cooperation in general. More significant is the political role they play in checking potential hostility. Joint military manoeuvres provide a country with a dual military-political deterrent, by providing occasion to demonstrate its military muscle on the one hand, and to signal the possible international alliances it can draw on in the event of aggression on the other.

As such, Egypt believes that by taking part in such exercises, it bolsters regional peace and helps reduce the risks of war. This is seen as especially pertinent in a region where the adversary is given to belittling the military strength of his opponent.

... exercises. Egypt deployed a massive 200 warplanes. Compared to the 220 warplanes deployed in the tremendously successful "real" airstrike against Israeli occupation forces in Sinai in October 1973, the message to third parties was clear. The Egyptian air force was much stronger, more efficient and up-to-date than it had been in 1973. Such a message could only help spare the region the misery of renewed warfare.

Joint military training on the whole reduces expenditure and minimises the need for increasing the size of the armed forces. Their deterrent impact achieves foreign policy aims at a far lower cost than if those aims had to be pursued through direct military action. At the same time, the partner that is materially richer bears the entire costs of the training exercise, as is the case when Egypt trains with the US.

Simply put, the political and military implications of joint manoeuvres is that two or more parties have an interest in conducting such exercises together. Nevertheless, this does not imply that the interests of the participants are necessarily identical. Among the countries that participated in the Bright Star manoeuvres this year, France and the US have clearly divergent interests in many areas, while the Egyptian and US leaderships have quite different perspectives on events in the region. Still, each side had something to gain from the exercise, even if it did not necessarily coincide with what the other participants hoped to achieve.

The overall aim of Bright Star is to provide participants with war scenario expertise and operational training. For its part, Egypt hopes to gain practical expertise in some of the high-tech military hardware available in the West with an eye to developing the permaments systems, which in turn will enhance the combat efficiency of the Egyptian army.

One aim at least of the Western countries that take part in the manoeuvres is to gain training experience in the desert conditions of the Middle East operational arena, in order to prepare for the possibility of having to mobilise their forces in this region as they did during the Gulf War of 1991. In Bright Star, as in all such operations, clear political objectives are at work. Each participant has a set of specific goals it hopes to achieve, according to its national strategic outlook.

It is also useful to note the distinctions between the Bright Star manoeuvres and other joint military exercises, such as those conducted by the members of NATO. The latter are conducted in accordance with a highly coordinated strategy specific to the European theatre of operations. Their aim is to iron out any flaws in tactics and manoeuvres and train the fighting forces of the member nations to the highest standards possible so as to enable them to fulfill their various tasks efficiently should the need arise.

No such unifying strategy lies behind the Bright Star manoeuvres. It cannot be presumed for example that Egyptian and American forces will be conducting joint operations at any point in the future.

The only similarity between NATO manoeuvres and manoeuvres such as Bright Star is that they are intended to convey a clear political message. The presence of local, regional and international media, as well as foreign military attaches, combines to reinforce the impact of this message and augment its power of deterrence.

'Time-out' for peace

Cairo believes that it is up to Israel to restore confidence in the peace process by addressing the core issues. **Nevine Khalil** reports

Cairo stuck to its position this week that the peace process is in grave danger because of Israeli intransigence, despite the reactivation of America's mediating role and last week's meeting between Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. Speaking to an audience of around 500 at the American University in Cairo (AUC) on Monday, President Hosni Mubarak's chief political adviser Osama El-Baz said that "not much was achieved" during the Arafat-Netanyahu meeting on 8 October. The summit's objective, he said, was simply to "restore confidence between Arafat and Netanyahu and reach agreement on procedural measures."

El-Baz described the next few weeks as the "*litmus test*" both for the Palestinian track and the peace process as a whole, alluding to expected talks between the two sides in Washington on 27 and 29 October. "If vital issues are discussed then there would be progress," he said. "[The talks] will be an indication of Israel's intentions."

Speaking in English, El-Baz said that if the "nitty gritty" issues such as safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank, redeployment in areas A and C and a moratorium on settlements were shelved, "then no meaningful progress would have been achieved".

According to El-Baz, the peace process has reached "a really dangerous deadlock because Netanyahu's government does not seem to be committed to, or enthusiastic about, the Oslo framework." This, he continued, has made the Palestinian leadership "increasingly conscious of the risks of making further concessions to Israel."

He asserted that the Palestinian side feels it has carried out its obligations under the 1993 Oslo Accords — most recently by going through "serious and steady security coordination" with the Israelis — and now it was the Israelis' turn to keep their side of the bargain. "They haven't, and now there is a situation of disequilibrium between the two parties," El-Baz noted. "We have to be cautious that the peace process is not derailed either by design or default."

He went on to say that there are "certain indications" which show that the Israeli government will not honour its obligations, especially concerning further redeployment in the rural areas of the West Bank. He said that Israel appears to be "unwilling and reluctant" to carry out its obligation of redeploying in areas A and C, as stipulated in the interim agreements. If this is true, El-Baz warned, the Palestinians will "lose credibility" in the peace process.

El-Baz said that from a Palestinian perspective, a "worst case scenario" raises the question whether the Israeli government would seek an alternative partner to the Palestinian Authority. This would develop as follows: "Israel begins negotiating final status issues, which the US endorses; the Palestinians will be forced to take maximal positions and [make maximal] demands during the talks; then the Israeli government would go to the Israeli public and say that the Palestinians are acting badly and that the Palestinian Authority is not the right partner, and that another partner should be Jordan." El-Baz emphasised that such a proposal was bound to be rejected by the Palestinians.

El-Baz said he doubted that Israel was attempting to undermine Arafat's position by handing over Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the godfather of the Palestinian militant group Hamas, to Jordan. "I don't think they [Israel] have hopes in this direction," El-Baz said. "Sheikh Yassin is not in a position to be a rival to the Palestinian leader [Arafat]." He added that Sheikh Yassin's release was intended to "generate optimism [and] boost morale" in the territories.

"It will not affect in any *significant* manner the balance between Israel, Hamas and the PA," asserted El-Baz. He added, however, that the Palestinians were "smart enough" not to fight among themselves, even if Israel was trying to find Arafat a rival. "They will not fall into that trap", he said.

El-Baz believes that the US, Egypt and the European Union have done much to generate trust between the parties, "but the [current] state of affairs is really hurting mutual confidence." He warned that lack of confidence is "most dangerous because it makes the parties less willing to make concessions". Calling for a more active European role, El-Baz said that although America's endeavours are important, it was in America's own interests, as well as in the interests of the region, that it should not be the only player. Nonetheless, he praised the US for its role, especially since Secretary of State Madeleine Albright has become more involved in Middle East peace-making. Although declaring that Albright "managed very ably" to make both sides agree to the resumption of talks, he said that "this is only procedural progress and not substantial progress."

El-Baz described substantial progress as Israel refraining from unilateral action which "prejudices or jeopardises" the final status talks relating to borders, settlements, Jerusalem, refugees, water and the Palestinian entity's relations with its neighbours, including Israel. "If these issues are settled in advance by Israeli unilateral action, then there is no use negotiating them," he said. Progress will also rate as substantive when Israel stops settlement expansion and attempts to change the status of Jerusalem through a *fait accompli*. Israel, he continued, should also refrain from confiscating Palestinian land, "because as long as they continue confiscating Palestinian property, the Palestinians will think Israel [is not aiming] for a territorial settlement". Finally, Israel should refrain from imposing "unfair" collective punishment on the Palestinians, which runs contrary to provisions in international law that collective punishment by association is illegal.

El-Baz also raised questions about a new term which was introduced to the peace process by Albright when she asked Israel to take "time-out" on settlement building in order to allow for the resumption of talks with the Palestinians. He was not sure about the definition or the duration of this "time-out" but said that Israel may be thinking of asking the Palestinians to also take "time-out" on Israel's obligation to redeploy in areas A and C. "It would be a quid pro quo," he said.

He remained hopeful, however, that recent contacts between the two sides "will lead to some breakthrough, however limited, [to show] that the peace process still has momentum". Progress on the Palestinian track, El-Baz noted, would encourage similar progress on the Syrian track.

El-Baz said that although public opinion polls show that 57 per cent of Israelis favour the creation of a Palestinian state, he was uncertain about "what price the Israelis are willing to pay to co-exist with the Palestinians, because they have a fixation on security."

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Al-Ahram Weekly

Hamas leader denies truce offer

In an exclusive interview, Khaled Misha'al, Hamas leader in Jordan and the victim of a botched Mossad assassination attempt, denied that his movement had any knowledge of a secret deal between King Hussein and Netanyahu, or that the Islamist group had sent a truce offer to Israel. He talked to **Lola Keilani** in Amman

"We have not been involved in the release of the two Mossad agents and, as a movement, we regret that their release took place," said Khaled Misha'al, the head of the political bureau of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) in Jordan, in an interview with *Al-Ahram Weekly*. According to Misha'al, the Islamist movement had no prior knowledge of the secret deal struck between Jordan's King Hussein and Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, according to which Jordan handed over to Israel two Israeli secret service, Mossad, agents who had, on 25 September, attempted to assassinate Misha'al by injecting him with a poisonous substance. In return, Jordan was given the antidote for the poison, saving Misha'al's life, and secured the release of Hamas leader Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, all Jordanian prisoners in Israeli jails, as well as 50 Palestinian prisoners.

Misha'al criticised the deal, however. "The normal, legal, procedure is that the criminals should face a trial and, when convicted, they should serve their sentence and be punished and not released," he said.

"I personally will not waive my right, or the right of my movement to prosecute the assailants. I have been attacked and currently I am discussing with my lawyer the legal proceedings that could, and should be taken," he said.

Misha'al's lawyer, Hussein Majali, head of the Jordan Bar Association, said that since the Jordanian government was responsible for the release of the two Mossad agents, "we will sue the government in court."

"The executive authority has infringed on the jurisdiction of the judicial authority and this is illegal," Majali said.

The two released Mossad agents carried forged Canadian passports, leading to a diplomatic crisis between Israel and Canada. The two men approached Misha'al as he was about to enter his office and sprayed a poisonous chemical into his ear with an instrument which has not been seized by the Jordanian police.

Through this attempt on his life, Misha'al said that the Israeli government had unmasked to the world, its terrorist face. The head of Hamas' politburo expressed his fear that if Israel gets away with the attempt on his life, it would continue to violate Jordan's sovereignty in the future.

"Releasing the two Mossad agents encourages Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to persist in his terrorist activities and in violating Jordan's security and stability," he said.

Misha'al also denied that his movement had sent a letter through Jordan to the Israeli prime minister offering a 10-year truce.

"I can tell you officially as head of the Hamas Politburo that we have not sent any letter, verbal or written, directly or indirectly, to Netanyahu," Misha'al said.

King Hussein, in a speech to the Jordanian people last week, announced that he had sent a message to the Israeli prime minister two days before the attack on Misha'al's life, offering mediation between Israel and Hamas. Israel admitted receiving the message but it was reported that it did not reach Netanyahu in time to halt the assassination attempt.

"It's no secret that 48 hours prior to the painful incident, I sent a message to the Israeli prime minister telling him that there was a possibility of dialogue between them and Hamas to stop the tragic acts of horror and violence," the king said.

Commenting on the king's statement, Misha'al said that "clearly all parties would like to pull Hamas into the circle of concessions and deals, because Hamas is an influential force and because it has a strong presence in the Palestinian arena. Thus, Hamas cannot be ignored or overlooked or marginalised. But this does not mean that Hamas has agreed to give any concessions, or that Hamas had sent this letter."

Hamas, which opposes the 1993 Oslo Accords between the PLO and Israel has repeatedly declared it will not negotiate with Israel. However, Sheikh Yassin, who was released by Israel after spending eight years in prison, has taken a compromising stand. He has suggested in recent statements, after his release, that coexistence was possible with Jews if Israeli settlement activity and occupation of Arab land ended.

Interpreting the sheikh's statements, Misha'al told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the spiritual leader was talking about a situation that would be created when all rights of the Palestinians were restored. He added that the sheikh's statements were not a new development as Hamas had been calling, over the past several years, for a truce between the movement and the Israeli state. He added that the movement was in fact against a transitional, gradual liberation of Palestine, but should fulfil the following:

"a. the total and real Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip,

b. withdrawal from Jerusalem,

c. the dismantling of Jewish settlements constructed on Arab soil,

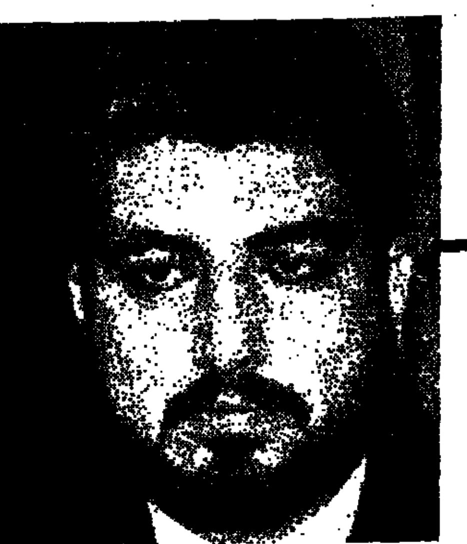
d. the evacuation of all settlers,

e. the release of all Palestinian prisoners,

f. and to give the Palestinian people real and full sovereignty."

Misha'al added that "if these demands are implemented then we can achieve a truce for a certain period of time. But this would never mean giving legitimacy to a state of occupation and aggression. This transitional liberation is only one stage of our objective for the total liberation of Palestine."

In an answer to a question whether Hamas was considering giving priority to political struggle rather than violent armed struggle which the world condemns and brands as terrorism, Misha'al said that accusations of terrorism



Khaled Misha'al

did not intimidate the movement. Hamas, he said, was practicing the legitimate, universally acknowledged right of all human beings to resist military occupation. Political struggle could start at a much later stage, once Israel becomes convinced that the continuation of its occupation is extremely costly at all levels, Misha'al said.

"Real terror is embodied in the concept of Zionism. The experience of the last two weeks is testimony to this. Israel practices state terrorism, international terrorism and chemical terrorism. The Palestinian people have therefore no choice but to resist until the enemy retreats and withdraws... We are against targeting civilians despite the fact that Israeli society is an armed society. There are 300,000 settlers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip who are armed while our people are not."

Misha'al referred to the example of Lebanon, where, he said, Israel started to talk of an unconditional withdrawal from the Israeli-occupied zone in south Lebanon, "only after sustaining heavy losses [at the hands of Lebanese resistance forces]. It might take longer in Palestine, but we will reach the same results."

Commenting on press articles in Jordan which have been calling on the government to close Hamas offices in Amman, on the grounds that the presence of these offices was turning the capital city's streets into assassins' territory, Misha'al would not accept the blame. "It is the Zionist entity which violated Jordan's security by exporting its battle and internal crisis abroad, and by violating the peace treaty with Jordan, peace which the Zionist state describes as warm." Misha'al added that Hamas's presence in Jordan was not a burden on the country nor does it embarrass any party. "Our work here is confined to political and media levels, which is permitted."

"We are welcomed in many other Arab and Muslim countries, and we are sure that Hamas will always be welcomed in Jordan, especially with our high credibility and with our sincere interest in Jordan's security. We in Hamas consider that the kingdom's security reflects positively on our security, and we do not interfere in Jordan's internal affairs."

As for the description of Hamas by some members of the Jordanian press as the king's political arm in the Palestinian territories just as Fatah is the political arm of Arafat on Jordanian soil, Misha'al said that the movement's relationship with Jordan was not meant to be at the expense of the Palestinian Authority (PA).

"We are not competing with anybody and we are not in a power struggle with any one. The movement is an integral part of the Palestinian political arena. Our relations with Arab countries are meant to be subservient to Palestinian interests and to endorse strategic support for our cause against the Zionist enemy. Our problem is only with the Israeli occupation," he said.

Commenting on relations between Hamas and the PA in the wake of the recent meeting between Palestinian President Yasser Arafat and Sheikh Yassin, Misha'al said that the movement deals with the PA as part of the Palestinian people despite the great political differences.

"Although we are against the Oslo Accords, which after four years have not achieved anything substantial for the Palestinian people, we strive to bolster national unity. Our main fight is against the enemy. This has always been our policy".

Free for all, except Baghdad

Recent Turkish and Iranian incursions into northern and southern Iraq has put to an increasingly harsh test international pledges to "maintain Iraq's territorial integrity" writes **Sherine Bahaa**

Traditional rivals Ankara, Tehran and Baghdad have all sent troops into Kurdish-controlled northern Iraq in the last 18 months, in temporary incursions against their own restive Kurds based in the region.

The United States and Britain, whose warplanes patrol the skies to impose the "no-fly zones" over northern and southern Iraq frequently witness cross-border raids by NATO-ally Turkey, but not from Iran.

Between 10,000 and 20,000 Turkish troops, backed by around 100 tanks poured into northern Iraq early this month attempting to wipe out the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) bases there. The PKK has been fighting for a separate Kurdish nation for Turkey's Kurds. Turkey complains that the PKK had made use of the chaos in northern Iraq in order to launch attacks against its army from there.

Since Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, Turkey has regularly carried out military incursions into northern Iraq, which, after the 1991 Gulf War, lost control over its Kurdish parts, and the area has been run since then by rival Iraqi Kurdish parties. The in-fighting among the various Kurdish factions has brought even more instability to the region.

The latest Turkish incursion followed heavy fighting between the PKK and Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) led by Iraqi Kurdish leader Massud Barzani. The KDP leader has been an ally of Ankara since the last Turkish military operation in northern Iraq in May against the PKK.

Following the Turkish incursions, Arab and Western countries have issued statements condemning such moves and have called upon Turkey to withdraw its troops. Turkey has not responded to these calls.

However, a similar incursion by Tehran against Iranian Mujahideen Khalq rebels based inside Iraq two weeks ago, has led the US to order the swift call of US aircraft carrier Nimitz to the volatile Gulf region.

Pentagon Spokesman Kenneth Bacon said earlier this week that Nimitz was leading a convoy of US Navy vessels that included two more warships, a destroyer, a frigate and an attack submarine. Pentagon officials said they were not aiming at provoking Iraq, but made it clear that Baghdad risked being punished severely if its aircraft violated the no-fly zone. Chasing invading Iranian planes was no excuse to violate the air embargo, US officials added.

According to a Western diplomat who refused to be named, Iraqi territories have become accessible to neighbouring countries without any deterrent. "Turkish forces have penetrated into Iraq in pursuit of the PKK while Iranian warplanes violated the no-fly zone in search for Mujahedeen Khalq bases in the south. It became clear that the no-fly zones have been closed only to Iraqi warplanes," reiterated the diplomat.

The diplomat argues that Iraq's neighbouring countries are trying to arrange things in a way that suits them. "Although there has been an overall agreement on the importance of Iraq's unity, the concept of that unity has turned out to be a problem in itself," he said.

Both Turkey and Iran view Iraq as a geographical entity, but without political sovereignty. "This for its part will have its drawbacks in the future," said the Western diplomat.

On the other hand, Turkey's repeated incursions into northern Iraq should not be tolerated according to some Arab countries, mainly Egypt and Syria, and to regional states like Iran. In the case of Egypt and Syria, the two countries view Iraq as a major Arab state, whose sovereignty and unity should be respected. Iran, on the other hand, regards any Turkish penetration of Iraqi territories as a renewal of the old Turkish aspiration to control Iraq's province of Musul which lies on the Iranian-Iraqi borders.

Nabil Nijm, Iraqi ambassador to the Arab League, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the Turkish position vis-à-vis northern Iraq and Israel, has raised concern and queries not only in Iraq but in the region.

"Before 1991, Ankara would have never thought of bombing Iraqi territories," Nijm said.



An Iraqi Kurdish peshmerge watches Turkish soldiers atop an armoured personnel carrier driving past Habur gate to return to Turkey on Monday *(photo: Reuters)*

According to Nijm, "the no-fly zones have nothing to do with UN Security Council resolutions imposed after the Gulf War. The air embargo was imposed mainly by the United States and Britain."

For Nijm, US double-standards have become flagrant. "At a time when the US has failed even to comment on the Turkish incursion inside Iraq, they raised hell when Iraqi warplanes chased the Iranian aircraft over the no-fly zone. This is a clear encroachment on Iraqi sovereignty which is underlined in all Security Council resolutions, including the oil-for-food deal," Nijm said.

Mohamed Abdel-Jabbar, a leading Iraqi opposition figure, is no less worried about the country's territorial integrity. Talking to the *Weekly* in a telephone interview from his London office, Abdel-Jabbar, a leading member of the opposition Iraq National Congress, blamed the US for the Turkish incursions. "The US has given Turkey a green light to use Iraqi air space and to enter Iraqi territories whenever they want, and to stay for as long as they want, without the least consideration for Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity," said Abdel-Jabbar.

But Abdel-Jabbar also blames Saddam Hussein's regime for the deteriorating condition in northern Iraq. "President Saddam Hussein's regime is directly responsible for this situation, in which other regional forces are attempting to settle their differences within Iraqi territory," he said.

Israel sinks deeper into Lebanese quagmire

The Israeli army's so far invincible image is being destroyed. **Zeina Khodr** reports from Beirut on the rise of Hizbullah and the steady fall of Israeli power in southern Lebanon

The Israeli army has always been viewed as the most effective fighting force in the region and yet its soldiers in southern Lebanon are bleeding and suffering from unprecedented low morale due to the increasing number of casualties among their ranks. Hizbullah, the movement which is spearheading resistance against Israeli occupation in southern Lebanon, is largely responsible for changing Israel's image of invincibility.

Experts and analysts agree that Hizbullah has become a well-trained, well-led, and highly motivated and effective force. The Iranian-backed party has also improved its intelligence capabilities, enabling its fighters to carry out effective attacks against the Israeli occupation forces. This year alone, Israel has lost 37 soldiers in fighting with Hizbullah resistance guerrillas. This is the highest Israeli death toll ever since Israel established its so-called "security-zone" in southern Lebanon in 1985. Seventy other Israeli soldiers died when two Lebanon-bound helicopters collided with one another in mid-air a few months ago.

Last week, two Israeli soldiers were killed and six wounded in separate attacks carried out by ambush that coincided with a top level meeting between Israel's northern command and senior officers of the Israeli-allied militia, the South Lebanon Army (SLA).

The Hizbullah guerrillas first detonated a roadside bomb near Markaba, severely damaging one of three armoured Mercedes cars carrying top Israeli intelligence officers. The cars had just passed through the Al-Dwawir border crossing point between Lebanon and Israel when the blast occurred, wounding an officer of the elite Golani brigade as well as a scout.

Less than two hours later, another resistance unit attacked four more cars at the same location with rocket-propelled grenades and heavy machine guns. Half an hour after that, the guerrillas fired rocket-propelled grenades and mortars at the headquarters of the Israeli 70th brigade near Markaba igniting a huge blaze. The total death toll was four Israelis and a member of its surrogate SLA militia. Four Israelis and two militiamen were wounded.

"The attack was not far from the Israeli-Lebanese border. Moreover, the attack was directed not against soldiers but high ranking officers," a security source in south Lebanon told [illegible] was complicated but successful. The Israelis were using civilian cars and yet the fighters knew what time they were crossing the border. This shows the resistance really has the upper hand nowadays," the security source added.

Such increasingly effective attacks, plus the disastrous Israeli commando operation in the southern village of Ansariyeh last month in which 12 soldiers were killed, are creating growing concerns in Israel over the efficacy of its security apparatus and possible "black holes" in its intelligence in south Lebanon.

An Israeli committee investigating the commando operation will release a report today, but many of its findings are expected to remain confidential. Some reports claim Hizbullah had lured the commandos, who belonged to Israel's most elite unit — Flotilla 13 — into a trap.

Ten elite marine commandos and a military medical officer were killed and a 12th soldier was missing and believed dead following Israel's costliest clash in Lebanon since 1985. The heavy casualties led the Israeli army to probe probable intelligence leaks to Hizbullah guerrillas. Reports indicate that more than 100 Israeli collaborators have been seized by Hizbullah over the past year and over 20 members of its allied militia have de- [illegible] that one of the collaborators seized is the informer who turned double agent and lured the Flotilla 13 unit to Ansariyeh.

The foiled operation, coupled with the high casualty toll, has placed pressure on the Israeli government which is facing mounting opposition to pull out of south Lebanon.

Laura Drake, a Middle East specialist who often meets with officials in the region, believes that Hizbullah military successes are forcing Israel to try and extricate itself from what Drake dubbed "a war of attrition."

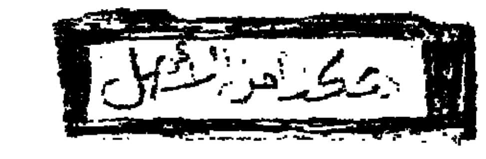
"The situation in the south is unacceptable to them [Israel], especially following the foiled Israeli commando operation at Ansariyeh. This military setback coincided with the Jerusalem suicide bombings. There is a perception in Israel that it is fighting a war on two fronts," she said.

Drake emphasised that Israel is faced with two choices: either expand the battlefield or find a way out. "Expanding the battlefield does not necessarily mean there will be troop advancements," she pointed out. "Israel will most likely resort to its policy of punishing civilians the same way it did in the Gaza Strip. It imposed punitive economic measures on the Palestinians with the aim of decreasing support to Hamas and other [illegible] could target Lebanese civilians so as to separate them from the resistance and create discord."

The recent military setbacks have dealt a severe blow to the Israeli army. This has fueled speculation that Israel may be preparing for a new offensive to raise the morale of its soldiers. Security sources and officials in southern Lebanon are down-playing the possibility of Israel launching an all-out war.

This does not mean, however, that the violence will stop in the south. Hizbullah has vowed that it will keep confronting the occupation until it ends. Hizbullah has made good on its promise to keep targeting the Israeli allied militia in the Jezzine enclave, a territory technically not occupied by Israeli troops, but under the jurisdiction of the SLA militia. Two militiamen were killed over the weekend in a roadside bomb attack. They were the first deaths in the area since last August.

Whatever course of action Israel chooses, it remains highly unlikely that Netanyahu's government would withdraw unilaterally from southern Lebanon without seeking security guarantees or a political settlement in return. However, it is equally unlikely that Israel can achieve either without first reaching a settlement with Syria.









A century of sociocide

Zionist settlers employed calculated doses of horrific violence to destroy the social structures of Palestine, writes Saleh Abdel-Jawwad. There was no room for *non-Jews in Herzl's plan*

A hundred years have passed since the first Zionist conference was *held on 29 August 1897* in Basel, that picturesque city on the Rhine which, centuries earlier, had seen the mass burning of its Jewish inhabitants who, according to popular belief, had conspired to unleash the plague. While scholars of the Zionist movement agree that this conference laid the organisational foundations for the establishment of the Jewish state, views conflict sharply over the nature of this movement which today, more than ever, appears to have succeeded in accomplishing its goals.

Proponents of Zionism portray it as a national liberation movement that aimed to deliver the Jewish people from centuries of persecution and dispersion. Putting theory into practice, they argue, required the perpetration of "minor injustices" against the Palestinian people, but injustices that in no way detracted *from the* "integrity" of the movement so as to compel a shift in course or a change in the realities it has produced on the ground.

Jewish detractors in the early part of this century contended that the Zionist movement would end Jewish cosmopolitanism, which had evolved over thousands of years. They also warned that it would create more complex problems and a more difficult dilemma than those European Jews faced. Although this contingent constituted the majority of Jewish opinion before World War II, the horrors perpetrated by the Nazis put paid to *many of their arguments.*

To opponents in the Arab and Islamic world and international progressive circles, the Zionist movement perpetuated intolerable injustices against the *Palestinian* people *and served* as an instrument to thwart Arab liberation movements and to throw this part of the world into disarray.

It is the opinion of this writer, moreover, that the Zionist movement, in order to accomplish its aims in Palestine, implemented a deliberate policy of comprehensive sociocide against the Palestinian people. This policy involved the long-term use of sociological and economic factors in conjunction with methods of psychological warfare in order to thoroughly disrupt and cripple the structures and bonds of cohesion within Palestinian society. Mass violence and terror were used in calculated doses, designed to ensure the ultimate aim — voiding the land of its original inhabitants.

In *Der Yudenstaat*, Theodore Hertzl, the father of the *Zionist* movement, made it clear that there was no room for non-Jews in his vision of a Jewish state. To the West, then as now essential for the success of the *Zionist* enterprise, the notion of *a Jewish state in Palestine* was *marketed* under the slogan "a land without a people for a people without a land". Behind the propaganda, however, in specialised writings intended for internal consumption, the actual existence of the Palestinian people was indeed an obsessive dilemma. Yet, with a blend of prevalent concepts of racial and cultural superiority that were current in Europe at the turn of the century, plus the practical fact of *European colonial supremacy, the notion* of "a land without a people" was skewed in the Zionist mind to become "a land without civilisation." The hybrid of Zionist and colonialist philosophies and attitudes lent credence to the Zionist colonisation of Palestine and legitimised utter disregard for the fate of the original inhabitants and their eventual expulsion, which at any rate was a primary condition for the creation of the state from the outset.

It is no coincidence, therefore, that the Zionist movement, at a very early date (1904), began to relinquish the model of ethnically pure Jewish *agrarian settlements, although it relied on cheap* Arab labour employed under inhuman conditions, not unlike the French colonial model implemented in Algeria. It became essential that the economy as a whole — and not just agriculture — be based on Jewish labour in order to guarantee the successful colonisation of Palestine and to restore a sense of cultural, ethnic and religious homogeneity, thereby creating the conditions consistent with the European concept of nationalism. To realise this, the original inhabitants had to be eliminated, not only from within the settler enclaves but from the territory projected for the Jewish entity as a whole.

In this respect, the Zionist enterprise resembles the American model to a large extent. Contemporary domestic and international circumstances, *however, posed obstacles to the use of* genocide to void the land of its original inhabitants, as had been the case in the American colonial experience. The breakthrough in mass communications since World War II and heightened international sensitivity render it virtually impossible for the Zionist enterprise to repeat the white man's extermination of native inhabitants in the territories he colonised. Also, the original Zionist settlers, coming mostly from Eastern European Christian societies, did not have a powerful mother society to sustain them.

More importantly, and fortunately for the Palestinians, the numbers and strength of the early Zionist settlers were limited. The Palestinians were part of the larger Arab world, which could not allow their extermination. Also, the Palestinians themselves had acquired a degree of cultural and economic advancement that obviated the sort of decisive superiority which enabled the white settlers to overcome the Native Americans in the US.

If, for these reasons among others, genocide was no longer an option, the Zionists had to devise a new mechanism that would yield the same results. Sociocide — the deliberate decimation of Palestinian society with the ultimate aim of driving the Palestinians from the land — was the solution. However supportive they were of the Zionist enterprise, the British protectorate kept Zionist schemes under restraint. It was thus in the war of 1948 and later, following the war of 1967, that the Israelis implemented their policies to the fullest extent.

The 1948 war produced astounding results. *Eighty-five per cent of the Palestinian villages* that fell under Israeli control were entirely destroyed and their inhabitants forced to flee beyond the borders of the newly declared state. These villages, *which constituted 50 per cent of the Pal*estinian villages within the former boundaries of the protectorate, were demolished one after the other — after they had surrendered. Most had suffered little damage from military operations, if they had engaged in military operations at all. Some of these villages were only demolished many years later, in spite of the urgent need of housing for the millions of Jewish immigrants who came to Israel in the few years following the war. Clearly, the motive was to efface all evidence of Arab presence and take full possession of the land.

Palestinians in the cities fared no better. Cities such as Bi'r Al-Sab', Bisan, Tiberius, and Safd were entirely evacuated of their original inhabitants. Others such as Jaffa, Acre, Lod and Ramla were *partially* evacuated, *leaving only* a few thousand in each as well as a few scattered families in the neighbouring villages, who only escaped the fate of their countrymen by a miracle. For weeks following the fall of their cities, the remaining inhabitants watched in horror as hundreds of Palestinians were subjected to summary executions. That was their initiation to a future in which they were to be tenth-class Israeli citizens.

The demolition of Palestinian villages and the evacuation of Palestinians from their homes in cities and villages was nothing less than a form of "ethnic cleansing". For the 20th century, it was unique in its severity, first because it remains largely unknown and second, because of its scope. Who would believe that in the area south of the Jerusalem-Jaffa-Eilat road (comprising most of Palestine), not a single Arab village remains? Along *that same road, only two villages, Abu Ghoush* and Beit Naqouba, have been left standing. Along the Haifa-Jaffa road, passing through some of the most fertile agricultural land in Palestine, only two villages *remain:* Al-Faridis and Jisr Al-Zaraqa'. This is the "miracle" of the Zionist movement: virtually total ethnic cleansing without mass genocide.

This is not to say that the executioner's axe did not have its turn. Moreover, it is no longer possible to believe the Zionist myth according to which the massacre of Deir Yassin was the exception that proves the rule of the "purity of the Jewish sword". Information has come to light that makes it impossible to ignore similar, if not more horrific atrocities committed in Al-Duwaima, Ain Zeitun, Nasser Al-Din, Al-Sifsaf, Abu Shusha, Tirat Hifa, Ailboun, Qira, Abu Zariq and numerous other villages. The city of Bisan was bombed after its inhabitants surrendered and after its occupation by the Zionist administration. These atrocities and others offer a poignant answer to the question: Why did the Palestinians leave their homes, their villages, their communities, their families and all their possessions?

The massacres as practiced by the Zionists were part of a calculated scheme. The terror they unleashed was an element of psychological warfare, designed to create panic and destroy morale. Herein lies the "ingeniousness" of the Zionist use of violence and terror: specifically administered doses were sufficient to cause entire villages to flee. It was the very method that generated the myth of "liberal occupation" in the wake of the war of 1967.

The tactical use of violence that decimated the social structure of the Palestinian people transformed the bulk of this population into refugees. Farmers are no longer farmers; they are part of a *growing mass of unemployed. With a single blow* in 1948, the Palestinian people were fragmented. They have been forced to live in different countries, endure different regimes, enroll their chil*dren in different educational systems.* Their unity and cohesion as a people have suffered a tremendous shock, which is exactly what the Zionist ideologues and the leaders of the state of Israel wanted.

It is odd that the Israeli people, with a very few exceptions, are not tormented by pangs of conscience. But then, their conscience was easily placated by new myths that accorded with the victor's rewriting of history. The Israelis were all too ready to believe that the war erupted because the Palestinians rejected peace, that the Palestinians fled their homes because their leaders ordered them to, that Israel is a small nation engaged in a defensive war against the onslaught of a sea of Arabs. They insist on casting themselves as David against Goliath, but the fact that they have employed *far more horrific techniques of warfare* against the Palestinian should put paid to that myth.

The writer is a professor of political science and director of the Centre for Studying and Documenting the Palestinian Community at Birzeit University.



***Israeli soldiers stand as an army bulldozer rips down a Palestinian home under construction outside the Al-Aroub refugee camp north of Hebron.* The Israeli army claim that the house was built without the necessary permits** (photo: Reuters)

Reviving the League

In a two-day seminar, Arab officials and intellectuals examined the achievements and shortcomings of the 50-year-old Arab League. Rasha Saad attended

In recent years, the Arab League has been the subject of severe criticism by Arab intellectuals. The organisation has *22 member states and has generally been* seen as a failure, particularly when its "achievements" are contrasted to its declared goals of strengthening Arab unity and integration.

A two-day seminar discussed reasons behind the League's docile nature and looked at means to strengthen the regional Arab organisation. Despite all the pessimism however, some speakers considered that the holding of a discussion on the Arab League's problems was a healthy sign and an indication of how the organisation continued to represent an important symbol of Arab nationalism.

Participants agreed that one of the first goals of League members should be to address the needs of the "man in the street" in its member states. Speakers recommended that the League should concern itself with social and economic issues that could be felt and appreciated by Arab citizens in their daily lives instead of addressing solely political issues.

Noureddin Hashaad, assistant secretary-general of the Arab League, believes that giving priority to political issues has the League issuing resolutions which it is powerless to implement.

"Like the EU, the Arab League should concern itself more with economic and social projects that are applied directly and which are more practical than political resolutions," he said.

He added that the League should establishes a committee that annually evaluates achievements as compared to preset goals.

In this context, Mohamed Mansour, director of the Future Studies Centre at Assiut University, called for creating better conditions for Arab workers. Mansour said that although there were some countries which have developed their labour laws, there are others which still need amendments in the area of employment to alleviate the suffering of workers.

He called for the establishment of a better climate for increasing inter-Arab trade relations. "How can there be any talk of a common Arab market when the volume of trade among Arabs states does not even exceed 8 per cent whereas it reaches 92 per cent with European countries?" he wondered.

Mohamed Zakaria, assistant secretary-*general of the Arab League, said that* creating a feeling of mutual interest among the Arab countries would be possible only if it was reflected and expressed by the people of the region themselves. "This will be realised only through creating channels of popular participation in the policy-making of the Arab countries. This seems a very difficult task, but not an impossible one. We can see slow changes towards democracy in the Arab world as a result of the increase in education and cultural awareness of the Arab people," he explained.

Participants, however, agreed that the Arab League was actually threatened and targeted by foreign powers — namely the US and Israel. It was argued that the US and Israel were seeking to marginalise the role of the League, replacing it with a regional cooperation group of Middle Eastern countries. This would allow Israel, Turkey and Iran to become part of such a regional organisation, while diminishing the notion of Arab nationalism.

Alieddin Hilal, dean of the Faculty of Economics and Political Science at Cairo University, believes that this fact was explicitly mentioned in the book written by former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres', *The New Middle East*. In this book, Peres argues that amidst all the changes taking place in the region, after the signing of peace accords between the Arabs and Israel, the Arab League should develop into a League of Middle Eastern countries.

Hilal also cited the fact that the US ignored the Arab League during the Madrid peace conference though it invited other regional organisations such as the Gulf Cooperation Council, and the *Maghreb Union, including Arab coun*tries in north Africa.

Hilal added, however, that external power alone should not be blamed for the inefficiency of the Arab League. "The absence of an active Arab political will, the lack of confidence among Arab countries, border disputes and personality rifts among Arab leaders all contribute to the setbacks," he said.



Arab foreign ministers during one of their meetings at the Arab League

Saud Al-Zubeidi, adviser to the League's secretary-general also blamed the policy making process in the Arab world for the organisation's poor performance. He stated that the Arab world is managed by rulers and not institutions. He also blamed the Arab press for failing to promote the notion of Arab integration because it has its hands tied and directed by the Arab regimes. He said that the press, accordingly, was manipulating the Arab people by offering them lies.

However, Talaat Hamed, spokesman for the League's secretary-general, denied that there was an absence of political will among Arab states in their dealings with the League. The members of the League have always given support to the League's projects, he said. "The problem lies in the lack of confidence among Arab countries after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990," Hamed added.

Suggestions were offered to revive the role of the League.

They called for freedom of the press and freedom of thought for intellectuals which would guide the leaders of states and their policies. They also proposed the formation of an inter-Arab lobby whose mission would be to push leaders into reviving the role of the League.

The seminar, which was organised by the Arab Strategic Studies Centre, and funded by Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahian, president of the United Arab Emirates, will be followed by another one later in November in Abu Dhabi.

Hilal suggested that intellectuals participating in the next seminar should issue an Arab declaration to revive joint Arab efforts.

Al-Ahram Weekly



German Chancellor Helmut Kohl with the map of Europe behind him *(photo: Reuters)*

Yeltsin curries favour with Europe in Strasbourg

Russia inches closer towards Europe to counter American hegemony. And Europe, with a prod from Asia, is lending Russia a helping hand, writes **Abdel-Malek Khalil** from Moscow

The Council of Europe summit in the French city of Strasbourg began last Friday. The meeting, attended by 21 presidents and 19 prime ministers, is the first since Russia officially joined the organisation in January last year. The acceptance of Russia topped the agenda.

The Council of Europe has a reputation of being something of a talking shop lacking any real political power. Its summit meetings are seen as a chance for leaders to air their grievances and vent their feelings and talk about their pet hates.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin was no exception. He made no secret of his displeasure with the fact that today, only the Americans enjoy superpower status. Russia is angry with Europe for bowing to pressure from America. In Strasbourg, Yeltsin pleaded with the leaders of Europe to accept Russia as a European power and pledged to carry out further radical political and economic reforms to transform Russia.

But most European leaders politely ignored him. On the face of things they were happy to welcome Russia to the European fold, but Russia had to prove that it was a modern European nation, upholding common European ideals and worthy of being a member of the European family of nations. Most Western European leaders remain unconvinced about the seriousness of Yeltsin's pledges to speed up the implementation of the economic reform programme and institute sweeping political changes that can guarantee democracy in Russia.

The Council of Europe is the continent's main forum for debating human and social rights issues. European leaders tackled many issues ranging from crime prevention and child protection to ethnic and racial minority rights and the establishment of a permanent European court of final resort. Yeltsin looked towards Europe to help Russia speed up its democratisation, privatisation and economic deregulation programmes.

The Council of Europe, created in 1949, now has a budget of $171 million. One of the main aspirations of Western European leaders at the summit, was to strengthen the European Court of Human Rights, which if Western European leaders had their way, would be immediately available to some 700 million people across Europe. It was agreed in Strasbourg to set up this court by the end of 1998.

The ultimate goal of the two-day gathering is to extend and consolidate human and social rights across Europe, urging and assisting Russia and the rest of the former Soviet bloc countries of Eastern Europe to adopt Western European standards of human rights. The meeting also plans to establish a distinctive European social model.

In his opening address, French President Jaques Chirac explained the pivotal role of the Council of Europe in "anchoring democracy" in Europe. He referred implicitly to the 17 countries of the former Soviet bloc which have joined the Council of Europe since the collapse of the former Soviet Union in 1991.

In addition to the 40 European full member countries, four applicants or "special guest states" are attending the Strasbourg summit including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Georgia. Belarus, Serbia and Montenegro are the only continental European countries that are not members of the Council of Europe.

Croatia has come under severe criticism during the summit for its failure to ensure press freedom and civil liberties. Croatia, along with Russia and Ukraine, is the Council's latest addition. But, Croatia was singled out for a prolonged attack on its human rights record.

The United States Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy and Human Rights, who headed his country's observer team at Strasbourg, led the attack on Croatia — he also led a less damning attack on Russia's human rights record.

In a letter to summit host Chirac, US President Bill Clinton declared Washington's readiness to contribute $1 million toward the operations of the Bosnian Human Rights Commission administered by the Council of Europe.

Yeltsin urged European leaders to try and lessen American influence on the continent. Russia is widely perceived to be striving for superpower status and it grudgingly had to accept the eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

Russia also seeks to limit American influence in the Asia-Pacific region. Russian Foreign Minister Yegveny Primakov has recently articulated a plan to draw closer ties with China and India — the two largest powers in Asia. But Russian moves are hampered by the lack of resources which will enable Russia to forge closer economic and commercial ties with Asian nations.

This leaves Europe as the main potential partner of Russia if Moscow is to break the American monopoly of influence over global affairs. One issue which enabled Yeltsin to isolate the Americans at Strasbourg was over the international ban on landmines. In his address to the leaders of Europe, Yeltsin made an appeal to all European Council member states to sign the Ottawa treaty banning anti-personnel mines. He also criticised America for refusing to sign the Ottawa treaty.

"Even though great Western powers say no, I say we support [the ban on anti-personnel landmines] and we will strive for this goal so that it is definitely settled and the treaty is signed," he said.

The majority of European powers sided with Russia on this point. However Russia received much criticism for the slow pace of its political and economic reforms.

All the major Western European nations pledged in Strasbourg to financially support Moscow's efforts to speed up the reforms.

Nobel for banning landmines

The campaign to ban landmines around the world won this year's Nobel Peace Prize. **Heba Samir** describes the winners' struggles

Last week, an American and her campaign to ban landmines around the world won this year's Nobel Peace Prize. Ironically, America has been one of the most determined opponents towards a worldwide ban on landmines. The prize went to Jody Williams, coordinator of the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL).

The Norwegian Nobel Committee said Williams had transformed "a ban on anti-personnel mines from a vision to a feasible reality."

Williams' crusade began in 1992, from one office in Washington and another in Europe. The campaign to ban landmines worldwide has proceeded with unusual speed this year.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan telephoned Williams to congratulate her. Boris Yeltsin promptly pledged his support to Williams' cause, announcing that Russia would sign a global treaty to ban landmines.

That leaves the United States and China as the only major countries to refuse to sign the treaty banning the export and the use of anti-personnel mines.

"It's a wake up call for the US. I would think that President Bill Clinton will find it hard to continue saying he is a leader on this if he doesn't sign the treaty," Williams, 47, said. White House spokesman Mike McCurry said US President Bill Clinton had no intention of altering his stand on mines. Washington refuses to sign last month's Oslo agreement banning landmines but the struggle continues so that all nations ratify the treaty.

Last month, representatives from 106 nations met in the Norwegian capital Oslo and endorsed an historic draft treaty to ban anti-personnel mines. Thunderous applause broke out in the meeting hall when it was announced that the draft had been finalised and a French representative proudly announced that "a clear, unambiguous text has been born." The Red Cross in Geneva issued a statement declaring the draft treaty a "victory for humanity".

The US, however, rejected the proposal outright. In Washington, President Clinton said the draft was rejected for failing to protect US soldiers and the president instead outlined a five-point plan to eliminate the entire US landmine stockpile by 1999, except on the Korean peninsula. The plan would also speed the development of alternatives. In Ottawa, Canadian Foreign Minister Lloyd Axworthy said the signing of the treaty will go ahead despite the American abstention.

Clinton, in rejecting a draft treaty banning landmines, "did what was militarily necessary and morally right," US Defence Secretary William Cohen stated in a letter published in the *Washington Post*. The idea that the US stands in the way of efforts to stop the maiming and killing by landmines around the world "is simply wrong, as is the impression of a rift between the Pentagon and other US government agencies on this issue," Cohen wrote.

According to Cohen, the Pentagon's policy is to end deployment of "pure" anti-personnel landmines by 2003, except in Korea where mines are integral to the US defence strategy against a possible North Korean invasion of South Korea. The Pentagon will try to develop an alternative to landmines in Korea by 2006, Cohen promised, but he stressed that the US intends to continue deploying anti-tank mines, including "sub-munitions" designed to keep enemy soldiers from breaching minefields or clearing mines.

Jody Williams

The late Princess Diana in Angola

America also has landmines at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, which the Pentagon says will be removed by 1999. The US plans to train deminers in more countries and increase its $168 million 1998 budget for mine-clearing initiatives.

Meanwhile, Pentagon commanders believe they can devise non-lethal alternatives to landmines within nine years to protect US forces in Korea from attack. US officials contend that landmines are the last line of defence from an attack by North Korea on the South and are needed to protect the 37,000 American troops deployed in the Korean peninsula.

The US launched an intense diplomatic campaign to persuade other countries to support final-draft changes advocated by Washington. After failing to gather sufficient backing, however, it dropped the campaign and President Clinton announced he would not sign the treaty because "no one should expect our people to expose our armed forces to unacceptable risks."

The US rejection raised questions about the treaty's effectiveness. The treaty is to take effect six months after it is ratified by the 40th country to sign it at a ceremony scheduled for 3 December.

Efforts to ban landmines started last autumn in Ottawa but the US only joined "the Ottawa process" in mid-August. Named "the Ottowa Process" because Canada started the initiative to get countries to renounce the production, sale, stockpiling, transport and use of landmines. Even though countries like Japan, Turkey, Poland and to some degree Australia, are not ready to join the majority in favour of a total landmine ban, the feeling is that more countries will eventually ratify the treaty.

More than 26,000 people each year are killed by anti-personnel landmines and the weapons are deployed in some 60 countries worldwide. The drive for a treaty gained momentum following the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, because of her crusade to ban mines. She had been one of the most high profile advocates of a total ban on landmines. Despite the Pentagon's stand, US First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton urged policy-makers to remember Princess Diana "by coming out against landmines".

ICBL has argued that the US demand for exemption is a threat to the overall aim of the treaty. "I am disappointed that the US is not part of the treaty, but I have no doubt that our country eventually will join other nations in a worldwide landmine ban," said US Democratic Senator Patrick Leahy, the leading advocate of the landmine ban in Congress. "I hope the Nobel Prize will help convince my country to join the process," Leahy told reporters recently.

According to Paul Jolly, the spokesman of the UN Economic Committee in Africa, between 10 and 20 million mines are still scattered around Angola as a result of nearly 20 years of civil war that ended in 1994. That makes Angola one of the most heavily mined places on earth. The International Red Cross in Angola estimates there are about 32,000 amputees in the country, which has a population of approximately 12 million.

According to Mahmoud Karem, deputy assistant to Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, Egypt is one of the most heavily mined countries in the world. It is estimated that there are about 23 million landmines in the country — especially in Al-Alamein and Sinai. British and German troops planted millions of landmines — 17.2 million — in Al-Alamein during World War II. More landmines were planted in Sinai during the Arab-Israeli wars.

Africa adrift?



Why must Africa put up with the bitter toll of political deaths? asks **Gamal Nkrumah**

Dark, brutal passion for power grips the African political scene. Farm labourers riot in Zimbabwe, Kenyan teachers take over the Ministry of Education, and another Congo crisis persists. Opposition leaders in Cameroon boycotted last Sunday's presidential elections — the many who languished in jail, warn that the country is heading for civil war. President Paul Biya's re-election was a forgone conclusion even before the results were declared.

In the small West African country of Sierra Leone, pro-democracy activists are being detained as the ruling military junta battles the Nigerian-led West African Peace-Keeping Force (ECOMOG) who are in Sierra Leone to restore the popularly-elected government of President Ahmed Tijan Kabbah. The sad irony is that Nigeria itself, which has emerged as the policeman of West Africa and is championing the cause of ousted civilian leaders in the region, is itself ruled by the military.

Old certainties across the continent are being called into question. It is obvious that something has gone adrift. Across Africa, the only way to prove one's political popularity is to hire mercenaries, or worse, mobsters and professional gangs of troublemakers. Trouble-shooters, too, are for hire. Governments hire youth gangs to break up opposition political parties. Private militias are effectively used against political foes. In Congo Brazzaville, former President Denis Sassou Nguesso took on Congolese government forces in a ruthless fight for power. Armed conflict in Congo erupted in June and prevented presidential elections in July, flaring up again last week before a scheduled peace in neighbouring Gabon next week.

The outside world watches on helplessly. Mayhem, as in Congo, Kenya, Sierra Leone and Rwanda, is inevitable. According to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), over 120,000 ethnic Hutu, suspected of plotting and carrying out the massacres of 800,000 of their ethnic Tutsi compatriots in 1994, await trial in Rwandan jails. The suspects include 2,150 teenagers and young men who were between 14 and 18 years old in 1994.

"We have to lend support in order to get people to trial, and other ways of helping to rebuild the country. But pretending that genocide didn't happen and certainly turning on the government of Rwanda because there are too many people in prison is the international community once again not accepting its responsibilities. Denouncing Rwanda is a disgrace," Clare Short, British secretary of state for international development, on a visit to Rwanda, told reporters this week.

Short was permitted to visit the prisoners and she spoke freely with those accused of genocide. Which European powers would allow foreign dignitaries to speak with political prisoners without the slightest encumbrance? But this is not the point. Imprisoning and executing criminals cannot bring back the dead — but the criminals who massacred innocent civilians in the hundreds of thousands must be brought to justice.

In Bordeaux, 52 years after the fall of Vichy France, Maurice Papon, a Vichy official and collaborator with Nazi Germany in exterminating French Jews, is being tried today for crimes against humanity. Past evil must never be forgotten.

In sharp contrast to Rwandan government officials' easy-going approach to visiting investigators looking into its human rights record, United States Senator Jesse Helms chastised the United Nations for sending an investigator around the US in an 18-day fact-finding mission that ended last Wednesday to look into capital punishment in America. The UN official, Wali Bacre Ndiaye, happened to be an African. Ndiaye was sent to America to see how the US implements international standards relating to capital punishment and to examine whether any deaths resulted from irregularities by law enforcement officers. Ndiyaye was to report back to the UN Commission on Human Rights on his findings.

"Please reverse any and all State Department cooperation with this absurd UN charade," a furious Helms wrote to the US Ambassador to the UN Bill Richardson. "Bill, is this man confusing the US with some other country, or is this an international insult to the US judicial system? Isn't this the perfect example of why the UN is looked upon with such disdain by the American people?" Helms angrily asked Richardson. Cannot America's criminal justice system be questioned? How many die in police custody in America? Helms cannot accept that the US human rights record be scrutinised by outsiders because such investigations are generally conducted in countries accused of human rights abuses. African countries have long suffered such scrutiny.

The point is that political violence is not confined to Africa, but the scale of politically-motivated violence in Africa is worrying. At the heart of Africa's political turmoil lies its economic ills. African governments which have eagerly instituted radical economic reforms and the economic elites who reaped enormous profits out of structural adjustment programmes are now witnessing the social and political realities of an angry continent.

Last week, white commercial farmers in Zimbabwe formed vigilante groups reminiscent of Rhodesian days as their black labourers ransacked the landowners' properties, confiscated crops, and thrashed farm managers. Even though Zimbabwe's 4,000 white commercial farmers and landowners were targeted, black farm managers were also severely punished and called "sellouts". The stage has been set to play out a most vicious class and race war in Zimbabwe's impoverished rural areas.

This is the first time in Zimbabwe's post-independence history that black farm workers have collectively gone on strike. Zimbabwe's striking farm workers are demanding wage increases of 135 per cent which would take their average pay from $30 a month to $70. Nick Swanepoel, the national president of the predominantly white Commercial Farmers' Union claimed that the white farmers cannot afford the 135 per cent demanded by their black workers. Many angry voices were raised in protest. The workers said they will settle for nothing less.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank-inspired economic reforms that swept across Africa in the late 1980s and early 1990s are already being tempered by the grim social and political realities of the continent. The difficult processes of economic deregulation, privatisation and political liberalisation have not been supported by the removal of external barriers put up by the European Union and other regional economic groupings in the highly industrialised North.

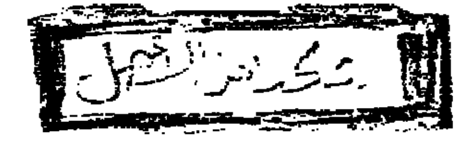
Instead of the systematic demonisation of African politicians and governments, the North must alleviate Africa's debt crisis. "Africa's debt burden has worsened, even though several African states have benefited from various debt relief schemes," Ethiopia's Central Bank Governor Ato Dubale warned recently at a meeting of the World Bank and the IMF in Hong Kong. Africa's debt burden is the chief target of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative undertaken by the IMF and the World Bank and other multilateral and bilateral creditors.

"The timely solution of the debt crisis will make it easier for African countries to use their limited resources to accelerate development. This is why we attach great importance to the HIPC initiative and urge flexibility in its implementation. We stress that the rigid interpretation of what constitutes a good track record will defeat the very purpose of the initiative," Duale said. The HIPC was launched in early 1996 and to date two African countries — Uganda and Burkina Faso — have been declared eligible to have an estimated $900 million in debt forgiven. Under the HIPC, recipient countries must first show compliance with economic liberalisation programmes for a three-year period, after which a decision is made on their eligibility for debt relief aid.

African delegates also urged the World Bank and the IMF to keep a close watch on the private investment sector. Rules should apply not only to IMF member governments, but also to financial market players, the Africans urged. The multilateral institutions should not force the pace of African countries opening up their markets. African countries have urged the multilateral institutions to eschew deadlines and conditions and trust the judgment of African countries in pacing and sequencing the pace by which they open up their markets.

For much of Africa, the immediate prospects for increased trade look dim. Ethiopian Finance Minister Ahmed Sufian told the Hong Kong meeting that African goods faced barriers in international markets. "We are concerned that despite agreements reached in the World Trade Organisation, export prospects remain unsustained for African countries," Sufian said.

African products have limited access to international markets because of the numerous barriers erected throughout the world and especially in the West and Japan. The North must make its domestic markets more accessible to African exporters or else the viscous cycle of political violence will continue to plague many African states.



Third World heartbreak over the death of the charismatic revolutionary freedom fighter, Che Guevara, turned into joy this week as Cubans celebrated the return of the remains of the fallen hero of the world's poor and oppressed to his adopted Caribbean-island homeland — the Western Hemisphere's sole surving socialist nation

A rose for the 'Che'

By Anouar Abdel-Malek

Spring 1966. Cuba. The blazing sunshine and welcome daikiris came after a 26-hour flight from Paris via Santa Maria de los Acores in a turbo-jet-propelled aircraft, fingers crossed. Luckily, the two of us, Mohamed Salah Sfia, the Tunisian sociologist and companion from Paris (now professor of sociology at the University of Montreal) and myself, invited by Sir Philip Noel-Baker, met in the lobby of the Habana Libre Hotel, to attend the international conference *Tiempo Libre y Recreación* (Free Time and Recreation). The two of us, amidst 2,300 participants, felt somehow lost, yet, rapidly, in focus: for this was a major rally against imperialism, on the road from Bandung (1955) to the Tricontinental alliance. Blessed the turbo-jet, across the Atlantic (nowadays, direct jumbos gracefully bring the tourists and other 'progressive' guests to the Varadero beaches, and delights).

The great majority of participants, we soon discovered, belonged to the real-concrete world of anti-imperialist movements. Two main groups and approaches: the national liberation mainstream, oft coupled with the socialist orientation (say, the Bandung-Tricontinental thrust); and the delegates from the West, mainly from the USSR and east Europe, with the usual American-North European ultra-left fringe.

As hours, and days, went by, we noticed that the protagonists of what was then derisively labelled 'real socialism' (as if the real thing was 'pure' and 'ethereal', by right of birth — never seeing the light of the real concrete world), around the central Cuban and Soviet lead, were, as it were, boycotted.

By whom? By the 'true revolutionary' ones. How? Who? Where? They were to be located in the higher, more luscious suites of the Habana Libre, led by a young European, fair-haired, in shining silk shirts, gold cufflinks, and furious looks. He, we were told, was the confident and mentor of Ernesto ("Che") Guevara, Fidel's legendary companion in the historic days of the Cuban revolution. So be it. But: this shining 'mentor'?

Proceedings went apace, with growing tensions between the two main groups, the tenants of national liberation insisting on giving precedence to the peoples' struggle against imperialism, while our Soviet companions, led by Professor Guennadi Osipov, later a warm and friendly co-sociologist, opted strenuously for the 'two camps' bi-polar approach, the Three Continents (Asia, Africa, Latin America) being at best the objective supporters of the Soviet-led camp, while China was already excluded from the socialist alliance.

Where was the "Che"?

Not at the final Plenary. Nor at the lush reception given by the Mayor of Havana at his glittering tropical palace. President Fidel Castro made a brief welcome-farewell visit, leaving it to Rual Castro, his brother and, by then, effective second-in-command, to address the participants and mix with them in vivid discussions.

The turbo-jet again, back to Paris. The "Che" nowhere to be seen, as if to reproach us all for our realism (opportunism?).

It was then, after Cuba, that I was to meet him, at the heart of my post-graduate seminar in Paris at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes (now en Sciences Sociales), between 1966 and 1986, centering on the "Sociology of national movements", then "Political and social theory". More than a third of the doctoral candidates were Latin Americans, scions of middle-class or wealthy families. All, perforce, belonged to the 'left' — a category unclear to this writer, being inclined as he was, and remains, to distinguish preferably between 'conservatives' and 'revolutionaries', 'traditionalists' and 'radicals'. Yet, all without a single exception, year after year, session after session, revolved around the "Che", his mission, lead, theses and martyrdom. Gradually, and more forcefully with the passing of time, his became the major presence in my Seminar, where the non-Latin Americans — French and Asians; Arabs and Europeans; Africans and Scandinavians — were oft bemused. How could a 'failed' revolutionary be a reference for the future, the guiding light, beyond textbooks and realistic analyses?

Life with the "Che", questioning his *wisdom, always respectful of his* martyrdom, year after year — and especially so since the late 1980s: fascist dictatorships crumbled for all to see in south, then central Latin America. Democratic coalitions, united front formations came to the fore. Even the usually pro-American free market elites in the major nations of South America are now regrouping (viz. the Mercosur), to protect their economies from Yankee penetration and hegemonism.

Now and then, year after year, as I kept my ever-realistic course, albeit with a growing civilisational orientation, items dropped from my old-time graduate students, reminding me of our flamboyant dinners at Les Milles Colonnes in Montparnasse, after the weekly Tuesday seminar: conference papers; a book; laurels; marriages; distinctions; sometimes, yes, a poem or two. Some were kept busy by the highest levels of office they had, and have now mercifully reached. Time after time, I was reminded of the "Che". He was theirs. He was with us. A man I never saw, while being little acquainted with his writings and speeches.

A man of vision. A man with a mission. A man of action.

Soon after he left Cuba for his last trip, his younger disciples discovered that the blond feline-looking young man from Habana Libre, his mentor, had left in his footsteps, literally, to 'cover' his last voyage for the world press (sic). Eagerly so, minutely. Thus, his zeal brought him to Bolivia — in the footsteps of the "Che". How? Why? When? Who?

History will not — yet — tell. Till the day of his passion: his CIA captors cutting arms and feet, torture after mutilation, till the final volley. The passion of Ernesto Che Guevara. The day of crucifixion.

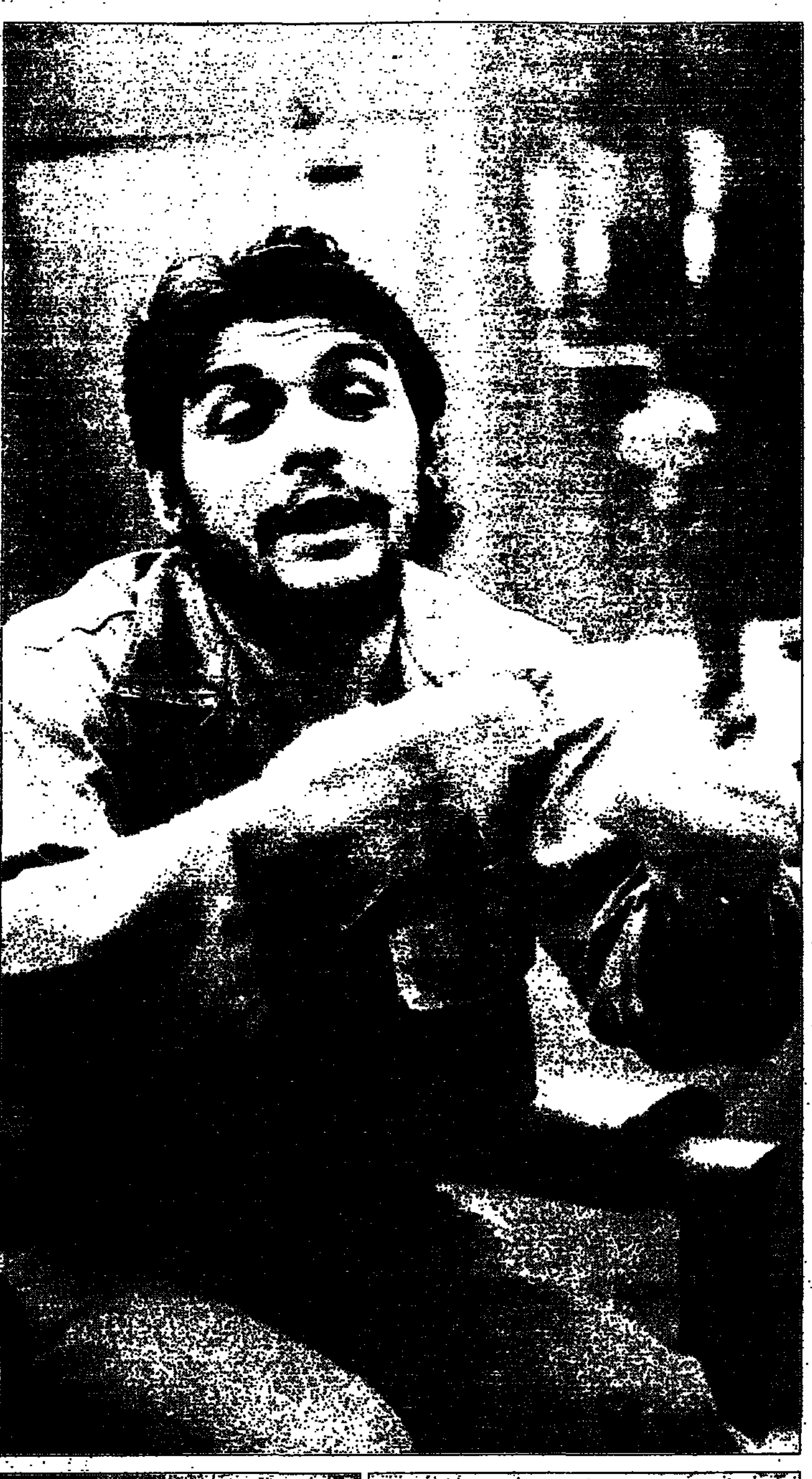
Weeks ago, the well-heeled *redacteurs* from the City were mocking his memory, on the pages of the most influential weekly in the English-speaking West, forgetting that "sarcasm is the lowest form of wit", as the Bard had it.

Forgetting the present-as-history, turning their backs on history-in-the-making — theirs now reaching its 'end'-course, slowly yet surely, for all to see.

A rose, therefore, a modest rose, for Ernesto Che Guevara. A rose amidst banners flying, poems ringing, singing music. The day of a new dawn.

If not him, whom, if one may, did Paul address in his Epistles to the Corinthians: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

May the Lord of justice pave the path of the "Che" in His light and mercy, for eternity!





Guevara (left) receives a prize from Nasser (centre) in 1959. Looking on is Ali Sabry



Guevara (right) welcomed by Hussein El-Shafei, then vice-president, during Che's last visit to Cairo in 1965

Guevara among us

Gamal Nkrumah goes on the trail of Che Guevara in the Cairo's '50s and '60s

"However you looked at him, Ernesto "Che" Guevara was unique," Mohamed Fayek told me. "By birth, he was an Argentinean who made Cuba his home. He was a Latin American who was passionately involved in the African anti-colonial movement. He understood Africa's problems and shared Africans' aspirations and concerns. I knew Che in the late fifties and early sixties in my capacity as the late President Gamal Abdel-Nasser's special emissary in Africa. For Che, the anti-colonial struggle in Africa and the anti-imperialist struggle in Latin America were one and the same. His murder was a great step backwards for us."

Fayek, the secretary-general of the Cairo-based Arab Organisation for Human Rights and the publisher of Dar Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi, The Arab Future Publishing House, described to me Guevara's last visit to Cairo in March 1965. "Che was a personal guest of the late Hussein Zulfikar Sabry, who was especially fond of Che and had travelled extensively with him in Latin America. We all revered the young revolutionary leader from Latin America. Che gave the people of the Third World a real sense of what they were about. Che helped shape a vision of what the struggles of the underdog were about."

At a time when many developing countries were jettisoning their non-aligned status and opting instead for the dubious non-NATO allies of America, Guevara urged Cuban President Fidel Castro to join the Non-Aligned Movement which was until then, barring Tito's Yugoslavia, an exclusively Afro-Asian movement. It was a deeply symbolic gesture.

"I remember what Che told me at the time of the Sino-Soviet split. He said our stomachs are with the Soviets, but our hearts are with China," Fayek mused. "In 1965, Che spoke to students at Cairo University and the students gave him a thunderous standing ovation. The students were enthralled. His battle cry was heard in Egypt," Fayek said.

Mursi Saad El-Din, at the time the deputy secretary-general of the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organisation (AAPSO), agrees with Fayek. "Che Guevara was a hero with a cause. But, unfortunately he never lived to see his cause realised. I first met Che in Algeria in 1965. I next met Che in Cairo later in the same year. A year later, I met Che again in Havana at the Tri-Continental Conference in 1966. The Egyptian delegation was led by Mohamed Fayek, then minister of information, and included Youssef El-Sebai, then secretary-general of AAPSO. He had a wonderful sense of humour."

"Che always wanted to move straight into controversial subjects," Saad El-Din said. "When I first met Che, he was planning yet another trip to Africa, to the Congo to be precise. He was very concerned about the turn taken by events there. In fact most of his trips to Cairo were because he was in transit to some destination further south in Africa. He was always on the move."

Many people fondly remember Guevara's visits to Cairo. "The secret of Che's charisma was his crossover appeal: for Africans he understood the anti-racism and anti-colonial struggles as few outsiders did, for European leftists he embodied anti-capitalist struggle, and for Arabs he represented the struggle for social justice," Fayek explained. He first came to Cairo in June 1959. His first tête-à-tête with Nasser was on 15 June 1959.

Guevara passed through Cairo for a 36-hour stopover on 21-22 August 1959, and then again on 26-27 August 1959. On 11 February 1965 he was in Cairo again on his way to Dar Es-Salaam, Tanzania. He was back in Cairo on 19-22 February 1965 and stayed on for the first two weeks of March 1965. Guevara again met with Nasser on 10 March, when they visited Shebin El-Kom — the centrepiece of Che's trip to Egypt. Nasser took Guevara on an electoral campaign tour in the governorate of Menufiya in the Delta. The presidential party, which included the late Abdel-Hakim Amer, then vice-president and chief of the armed forces, was on its way to Mit Abul-Kom, Sadat's home village, for a traditional country lunch. En route, Guevara was taken to a typical rural constituency to see for himself the success of Egypt's agrarian reform.

As the presidential party approached the large bridge near the village of Kamshish, a woman approached leading a boisterous procession of villagers brandishing placards with slogans welcoming Nasser and Guevara. The woman was Shahinda Maklad, a leading peasant's rights activist and currently secretary of the Tagammu Party's peasant committee. She flagged down the presidential motorcade. "Nasser was curious, and told his aides to stop harassing the villagers. He summoned me and I found myself face to face with Che. Together I and the villagers — the entire village had come to greet Nasser — chanted the words: 'With blood we washed *away* the *spirit* of feudalism. We *realised* our aspirations'," recalled Maklad.

It was soon after her encounter with Guevara in Kamshish that her own husband, Salah Hussein, a peasant leader, was assassinated by big land-owners. "Guevara was martyred a year after Salah," she added. For Maklad, Che's common touch, his easy contact with ordinary people, was the reason the idyll lasted so long.

'In honour of Che'

As Cuba celebrates the legacy of Latin America's greatest revolutionary, controversy continues to surround the Helms-Burton Act, which casts the US in the role of free-market interventionist. **Faiza Rady** examines these and other contradictions

Inaugurating the Fifth *Congreso* of the Cuban Communist Party (CCP) last Wednesday in Havana, Cuban President Fidel Castro dedicated the session to the memory of his fallen comrade-in-arms, Ernesto Che Guevara, the legendary Argentine freedom fighter who played a key role in the Cuban Revolution before taking the struggle to the Bolivian interior, where he was captured and murdered by CIA-led special forces near the town of La Higuera on 9 October 1967.

Timed to coincide with the 30th anniversary of Che's death, the *Congreso* will run in parallel to nine days of public commemorations in his honour, to be followed on 17 October by a ceremony in *which his* mortal remains will be interred in a special mausoleum in Santa Clara — the site of Che's most decisive victory against the US-backed troops of former Cuban dicator Fulgencio Batista. "For us Cubans, Che, *commandante*, friend, you are not dead. Images of you, memories of you are multiplying and spreading around the world. Every day you become a yet greater symbol of rebellion and of a life of hope," a woman police sergeant told school children in a square in Old Havana.

"Now that we have [Che's] mortal remains here in Cuba, we can also draw closer to his immortal ideas, his immortal example," President Castro told the CCP *Congreso* as it renewed its pledge to abide by the principles of a revolution Che Guevara helped create. The *Congreso*'s draft report stated that "socialism in Cuba is an organic part of the historical process," and among its resolutions the *Congreso* affirmed that "the historical continuity of the revolution can only be grounded in the preservation of socialism."

In a similar spirit, the resolutions of the *Congreso* which ended on Friday, also emphasised the party's determination not to suffer the same fate as communism in the former Soviet Union and the East European bloc. "The fact that we have to reduce costs at state firms doesn't mean we are going to privatise anything: we're not travelling down that road," the Cuban president told the gathering of 1,500 delegates representing the CCP's membership of 1,270,000. "We have no reason to create the enormous inequalities that exist in other societies," said Castro. "As Marxist-Leninists, we fight not to create individual millionaires, but to make the people of Cuba as a whole millionaires."

Since Cuba lost its main trading partner, the Soviet Union, in 1991, Castro has been forced to raise capital by seeking foreign investment in the public sector, allow the emergence of small businesses and permit the use of the US dollar as a parallel currency to combat a thriving black market. The Congress ratified these reforms, but refused either to further "liberalise" the economy or to decentralise the state.

Reaffirming its commitment to the socialist planned economy, the draft policy statement declared that "the state still has the guiding role in directing the economy, and under any formula adopted, therefore, its interests should be adequately represented." The *Congreso*'s aim was clearly to leave itself sufficient room for manoeuvre to be able to adapt its economic policy to whatever the vagaries of globalisation and the dominant market economy may throw at it. "It's an irreversible process and we are part of it," Deputy Foreign Investment Minister Marta Loma said of Cuba's quest for foreign capital and the need to make some adjustments in the direction of market capitalism. "Today we cannot go it alone. That is the direction in which the country is beaded."

In reference to the neo-liberal policies adopted by other Latin and South American countries, where poverty has increased, unemployment has soared and social services and health and welfare benefits have been slashed, the *Congreso*'s draft report stated that "social inequality is growing due to the influence and expansion of neo-liberalism... not only in the Third World, but in the industrialised First World as well. In Latin America, the abyss separating the privileged minorities and the dispossessed is wider than in other regions of the world: half of the population lives below the poverty line, while more than 100 million human beings suffer extreme poverty."

By comparison Cuba has fared well, despite the ever-tightening US embargo which has effectively throttled the economy. "We have achieved the right to life," says the report, explaining that "infant mortality has decreased from over 60 per 1000 live births to less than eight at the present time, and life expectancy has risen from 55 years to 75 years." Such figures put Cuba "in first place in the Third World and are comparable to those for highly industrialised countries," claims the CCP draft report.

Indeed, the 1997 UN Human Development Report (UNHDR) confirms that Cuba has reduced the incidence of human poverty (measured by health, life expectancy and standards of living) to less than 10 per cent of its population. Out of 78 developing countries, the *UNHDR ranks Cuba* second on its human poverty index (HPI). This high HPI rating marks the island's success in providing its population with access to safe water, health services and education — in comparison with other countries such as Mexico (HPI 7), Jordan (8), Libya (21), Algeria (37) and Egypt (44).

Another achievement of the Cuban revolution discussed by the *Congreso* was gender equality. Before 1959, only 12 per cent of Cuban women worked, while the current level of female participation in the labour force is estimated at 42 per cent. Moreover, the proportion of women among intermediate-level technicians and university graduates has now reached 60 per cent — far surpassing the number of male graduates.

Dismissing the *Congreso*, State Department Spokesman James P Rubin told reporters that the CCP's tone conveyed "a sense of a certain time warp," and that "no matter how many times you play the same old movie, it's not going to change the desires and the needs of the people of the modern world."

Despite the US State Department's verbal commitment to recognising the *Cuban* people's aspirations, many analysts blame Washington for a large part of the island's economic woes. The 1995 UN General Assembly resolution against the blockade stated that the US embargo of Cuba causes shortages of food, medicine and other important supplies for 11 million people and constitutes "an immoral policy that uses hunger and disease as political weapons."

"By tightening the blockade through Helms-Burton, the US government hoped to destabilise Cuba and arouse anti-Fidel sentiments among the people — but this did not happen," Berta Joubert, a Puerto Rican physician with the US-based International Peace for Cuba Appeal told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Regarded by many analysts as a veritable political manifesto, Helms-Burton — in US government parlance, the "Cuban Liberty and Democratic Solidarity Act" — codifies the American embargo against Cuba unless and until democratic elections are held and the country moves towards democracy under the aegis of the "free market based on the right and enjoyment of private property". It is specifically stipulated, however, in section 205a of the extensive and verbose document, that this peculiarly American version of democracy may not include the Cuban leader Fidel Castro or, for that matter, his brother Raúl. Nor, despite the rhetorical insistence, is it clear that the sort of trade the State Department has in mind would really deserve to be called "free".

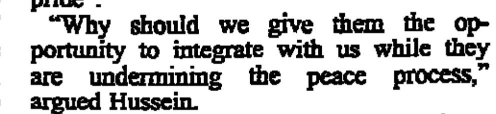
Critics claim that, buried under a barrage of neo-liberal new speak, Helms-Burton contains provisions for establishing the most exacerbated forms of prohibitive market controls. To take one example: in addition to banning US companies from directly trading with Cuba, the law prohibits such companies from buying Cuban products through a third party. In an attempt to further restrict Cuban trade, Helms-Burton also allows American individuals and companies to sue any foreign company and its shareholders for the use of confiscated state property originally belonging to the Cuban American Contra elite that gravitated around the former Baptista dictatorship.

Concerned that the US trade war may set a precedent for Washington to coerce other Latin and South American countries into submission, the South American regional organisation, the Rio Group, has strongly denounced the law. In a statement released in Brasilia last year, the Rio Group said that Helms-Burton "ignores the fundamental principles of respect for sovereign states", adding that the law's implementation "means extraterritorial application of domestic law, which is in conflict with international law."

Last week in Havana the *Congreso* described the situation in slightly different terms, declaring simply that "the United States hopes to reinstate in Cuba a government of the United States, by the United States and for the United States".

MENA IV in the balance

To attend, or not to attend? That is the question. Fatemah Farag looks for the answer


Abdel-Alim
Amin

The invitations to attend the fourth Middle East/North Africa economic conference (MENA IV), scheduled to be held in Doha, Qatar from 16-18 November, are out.

But with the credibility of the peace process — seen by Arab countries as the backbone of regional integration — diminished as a result of an escalation of tension between Arabs and Israelis, the question now is should Egypt attend, and on what terms?

For its part, the government is adopting a wait and see attitude with regard to the level of representation in the Doha conference. President Hosni Mubarak has, on several occasions, stressed the relationship between political and economic progress on the regional level. In short, it is simply not enough for the parties to the peace process to sit together, Egypt wants to see tangible progress.

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, unlike former President Anwar El-Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, "does not realise that peace is a deal — you give something to get what you want," said Taha Abdel-Alim, deputy director of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies.

If Netanyahu has failed to make this connection, then the US, perhaps, has chosen to overlook it.

The US has for months been pressing Egypt to participate in the conference, arguing that regional political tensions should not be allowed to overshadow this economic gathering.

Last Thursday, while meeting with Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, US Under-Secretary of State Stuart Eizenstat did not mince words in expressing the US's desire to see Egypt attend MENA IV.

"It is important to divorce political considerations from an economic conference," he said, adding that "investors want a sense of certainty and stability... and the notion that the political process... is not going to be an impediment to doing business here."

The conference, he told Moussa, "will send a signal that the Middle East is again open for business, even at a time of difficult political circumstances."

Abdel-Alim argues that Egypt should go — but for different reasons.

By attending, said Abdel-Alim, Egypt will "make clear who is in favour of peace, and highlight who is responsible for the present crisis." This point of principle, he argued, would have more impact on international public opinion than boycotting the conference.

But not everyone is as willing to take such an approach to participation in the Doha conference.

Many of the country's opposition political parties, such as the Islamist Labour Party, the Nasserist Party and the leftist Tagammu, have called for a boycott of the conference and, in some cases, a freeze in the normalisation process between Egypt and Israel.

While the liberal Wafd Party has kept silent on the issue, leaving the decision to attend to the government's discretion, Abdel-Moneim Hussein, a member of the party's higher committee, stated that boycotting the conference is a "matter of national pride".

"Why should we give them the opportunity to integrate with us while they are undermining the peace process," argued Hussein.

The boycott, he said, "would also be a slap in the face of the US... who has been unwilling to deal with us as a leading state in the region."

Hussein's objections are shared by Galal Amin, professor of economics at the American University in Cairo. Amin feels that regional integration — a plan presented by the United States to the area previously within the context of the Cold War and being presented today within the framework of globalisation — should not be a priority at the expense of national interests. He added that a common Arab market would be a better alternative.

"Why should we go when the only card we have left to play is the economic one," said Amin.

"We no longer have a military advantage or political leverage," he said. "By giving in to the idea of a Middle Eastern economic market, we are accepting to enter an arrangement, whose costs by far outweigh the benefits."

In part, many of the arguments around whether or not to attend the Doha conference stem from one main point: Israel's interest in the Middle East, and the motives behind this interest.

Netanyahu's Likud government, argued Amin, has tried to paint a picture showing that it can realise greater gains by boosting economic ties with the European Union than with Arab countries. But in reality, he said, this is merely a ploy to get a bigger and better slice of the pie.

"It is within Israeli interest to say we are not interested in Doha and in economic cooperation with the Arabs... and therefore maximise their profits," he said.

But if Israel's nonchalant attitude can be viewed as a means of countering pressure by Arab governments, the same can be said for the Arab approach to this conference.

The peace process can be seen as the tool through which the Middle East market can be integrated into the global market. Arab governments, as well as Israel, the majority of whom have adopted liberalisation programmes, are eager to push forward on this front. As a result, the current tension surrounding the conference is seen as a tug-of-war to see who will take the lead in the region.

"The relationship Arabs want with Israel is one based on competition between equals to see who can emerge as the regional leader," said Abdel-Alim.

Taxiing to growth

THE GOVERNMENT'S fiscal policies were discussed at a workshop attended by leading economists this week. Finance Minister Mohieddin El-Gharieb announced that the ministry is reviewing the possibility of lowering the sales tax on basic goods. He ruled out an increase in income taxes.

The finance minister pointed out that although the tax revenue in the fiscal year 1996/97 was LE1.2 billion less than that projected in the budget, it was higher than the year before. The minister said that customs revenues increased to LE11 billion, despite the lowering of duties.

El-Gharieb also announced that the Finance Ministry will issue long-term bonds worth $300 million by the end of 1997, in order to lower the $140-billion public debt. Proceeds of the privatisation of state-owned banks represent another source of revenue which the ministry plans to use to decrease the public debt.

The one-day workshop was co-sponsored by the Cairo Center for Economic Information and the Economic Policy Initiative Consortium, a non-profit organisation established through a cooperation agreement between the Egyptian Government and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), signed in 1996.

Accounting, Egyptian style

EGYPT'S Economy Minister Youssef Boutros Ghali announced early this week that Egypt has developed its own accounting standards, tailored specifically to the needs of Egyptian laws and regulations.

The new standards, modelled around their international counterparts, will be used as a unified scale according to which the performance of companies will be measured.

The main change devised under the new standard is the emphasis on transparency.

"Transparency is the basic element for the success of the structural adjustment programme," said Boutros Ghali.

According to Abdel Hamid Ibrahim, chairman of the Capital Market Authority, the new standards will enable the financial listings of companies to be prepared according to internationally accepted standards. The new standards are also part of the preparations to transform the Egyptian capital market into a regional capital market.

The Economy Ministry will organise a training programme for those interested in learning how to apply the new system, which goes into effect immediately.

Iraq compensations awarded

DURING its 25th session held last week, the governing council of the United Nations Compensation Commission (UNCC) decided to pay 223,817 Egyptian workers $84.3 million owed to them by Iraq since the Gulf War.

The government had previously filed one consolidated claim on behalf of over 900,000 Egyptian workers seeking compensation for funds deposited in Iraqi banks.

The claim consolidated 1.24 million individual claims with a total asserted value of $491 million.

According to the UNCC decision, the rest of the consolidated claim will be determined through negotiations between the Iraqi and Egyptian governments.

"Although the government filed a consolidated claim with a total value of $491 million, the UNCC approved only claims of cash transfers which were sent between 2 July and 2 August in 1990. This means that the UNCC has nothing to do with the rest of the consolidated claim," said Abdel-Kader El-Assar, a consultant with the Manpower Ministry's International and Technical Cooperation Division.

Moreover, the UNCC approved the second of six instalments of categories A and C. Roughly 54,000 Category A claimants will receive $136 million and 18,000 Category C claimants will receive $45 million.

Category A claimants are those who were forced to flee as a result of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait while Category C claimants are those who lost property valued under $100,000.

Cheques for Category A claimants, estimated at about LE8,000 each, will be released within the next few weeks, said El-Assar. The release date for Category C claims, as well as the value of the cheques have yet to be decided.

The UNCC was established in 1991 as a subsidiary organ of the Security Council to decide claims submitted by victims of Iraq's invasion and occupation of Kuwait.

The council's approval for Egyptian workers' claims brings the total number of claims resolved by the commission to over 2.4 million out of over 2.6 million filed with the commission since 1991. The total compensations approved so far by the governing council are valued at over $6 billion.

Businessmen bash Doha

The 1997 Middle East/North Africa Economic Conference in Doha may be on track. But few Arab and Egyptian businessmen seem likely to go

Ozalp

For participants in the 1996 Middle East/North Africa (MENA) Economic Conference in Cairo, it was business as usual, despite the breakdown in peace resulting from Netanyahu's hard-line policies.

The conference afforded Egypt the opportunity to showcase its economy, but given the response — or lack thereof — to the November 1997 MENA conference in Doha, few seem convinced that any real gains were realised, either for Egypt or the region.

And, faced with a still stalled peace process, members of Arab business circles — the majority of whom have decided to boycott the Doha conference — feel that the 1996 MENA conference in Cairo was merely an extension of the failures of the previous conferences in Amman, Jordan and Casablanca, Morocco and "a waste of time" said Khamis El-Helbawi, secretary-general of the 10th of Ramadan Investor's Association. His group was one of the many to attend the last conferences but plan to boycott the upcoming one.

The short list of tangible accomplishments seems to back this argument. On the regional level, nothing has materialised of the many projects outlined by Arab countries in their agenda for regional integration. No progress has so far been made on the agricultural projects proposed by Egypt, Palestinian infrastructural projects or Jordan's Dead Sea mineral projects. Also yet to see light of day is the so-called Riviera project signed by Egypt, Israel and Jordan during the 1995 Amman conference.

But the most poignant shortcoming noted by businessmen is the continually deteriorating state of the Palestinian economy. Although this should have been one of the first economies to benefit from the MENA conferences, frequent border closures and confrontations with the Israelis have left the Palestinian self-rule areas on even shakier ground than before.

Simply stated, "the political atmosphere is not suitable for economic cooperation on the regional level," said El-Helbawi.

Like El-Helbawi, scores of other businessmen are not willing to overlook the breakdown in peace, deeming it a precursor to any successful regional economic integration efforts.

In the case of Egypt, businessmen argue that any economic progress realised so far is a product of the country's ambitious economic reform and structural adjustment programme and its standing as the single largest market in the region. MENA, they say, can claim little of the credit.

Members of the Egyptian Federation of Chambers of Commerce, who have long upheld the Arab boycott of Israel, say that the group will have no dealings with Israel so long as there is no progress in the peace process.

Recalling that on several occasions, Israeli commercial organisations tried to cooperate with the EFCC, the federation's Deputy Chairman Khaled Abu Ismail said that "the EFCC refused because nothing worthwhile is to be expected from these people unless there is a real peace."

Israel stands to benefit tremendously from the MENA conferences, he said. But for the Arabs, "Israel represents very little [in terms of] potential economic gains." Still, if EFCC members, like members of the other businessmen's groups, wish to attend the Doha conference, they may — just not as representatives of their organisations.

Other businessmen's and trade groups, like the General Union of Chambers of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture, which have not received an invitation to this year's conference, are not losing sleep over it. The group, along with dozens of others, is busy preparing for the Arab businessmen's conference, scheduled for 18 October in Beirut.

If what many of these businessmen believe holds true, then it is unlikely that they will be missing much.

MENA conferences should not be viewed as the only channel for regional economic cooperation, argued Mohamed Ozalp, senior general manager of Misr International Bank, mainly because their goals are not always consistent with the needs of a particular state.

"We can develop the process started by the Arab League, in terms of identifying an Arab common market or establishing the base for one," said Ozalp. "You don't need a MENA conference to do that."

Reported by Economy staff

Private Infrastructure financing in developing countries is rapidly rising

1990 1991 1992 1993 1994 1995

Power BOOTs for private sector

Mona El-Fiqi attended last week's World Bank seminar on private sector participation in infrastructure projects

Egypt's private sector must break into infrastructure projects through "the build, own, operate, transfer system" (BOOT), said participants in a World Bank-sponsored seminar last week in Cairo.

Only one such project — a 650 megawatt power station in Sidi Krir, west of Alexandria, has so far been earmarked for the private sector. But investor interest in such projects is beginning to peak, in part because the World Bank is offering guarantees to the private sector.

Under such BOOT infrastructure agreements with the private sector, the government and the company agree on a price for the project. If the project costs exceed the approved amount, the World Bank will pay the company the difference.

BOOT projects are built and run by private sector companies for a specified period of years before being handed back to the government.

Such guarantees have been offered by the World Bank for years, especially in private sector energy projects.

But for them to be fully successful, as in the case of Lebanon or Mexico, the government must provide the necessary rules and regulations.

"Instead of being a monopoly provider of infrastructure services, the government should focus on defining rules that enable private investors to compete to provide the best services to customers," said Nemat Shafik, director of the World Bank's Private Sector Development and Finance Group.

While bidding for the Sidi Krir project was scheduled to begin on 15 October, many of the investors said that they encountered some bureaucratic difficulties. They added, however, that this is mainly a result of the fact that this is Egypt's first BOOT power project, and that future bids are likely to run smoother.

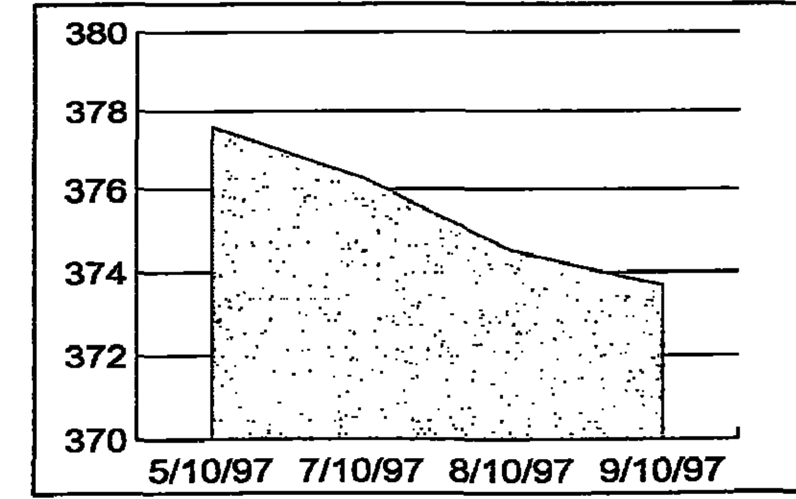
According to World Bank records between 1984 to 1995, nearly 90 countries privatised roughly 350 infrastructure companies. Additionally, more than 80 countries had nearly 600 active new private infrastructure projects.

In the Middle East and North Africa, however, there were less than 10 infrastructure projects — mainly gas pipelines and telecommunications projects — that used private investments.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Market report

Market slips after nine-week gain



AFTER nine weeks of steady increases, the General Market Index slipped by 4.41 points for the week ending 9 October to close at 378.

The volume of trading, however, jumped to LE756.9 million, in part because of strong performances by some manufacturing sector companies.

In this sector, roughly LE328 million in shares of the Paints and Chemical Industries changed hands, accounting for 43.4 per cent of total market activity. The increasing demand for the company's shares stemmed from investor interest in capitalising on the difference between the company's share price and that of its Global Depository Receipts (GDRs) on the London exchange. Pachin's GDR's are offered at LE121, LE5 more than the company's share price on the Egyptian stock exchange.

News of the divestment of four per cent of Egypt Electric Cables to an anchor investor has increased demand for the company's stock, pushing up share prices by eight per cent to close at LE104.

Shares of the Egypt-British Bank recorded the greatest increase in value, gaining 21.54 per cent to close at LE107.2, while those of the Egypt Iron and Steel Company registered the greatest drop, slipping from LE8.19 to LE7.05.

In all, the shares of 49 companies increased in value, 61 decreased and 16 remained unchanged.

Rédacteur en Chef Exécutif
Mohamed Salmawy

Président et Rédacteur en Chef
Ibrahim Nafie

The poor, the poorer and the poorest

The recently published 1996 Egypt Human Development Report, takes poverty as its main theme. Mariz Tadros investigates where the poor stand today, where they may stand tomorrow, and talks to the minister most directly concerned with their lot

"Nobody goes to sleep on an empty *stomach*" is a popular adage in Egypt. It is not that Egyptians are oblivious to the extent of poverty in their country, but rather that they believe in a still omnipotent spirit of charity. Yet according to the recently released Human Development Report, 23 per cent of the population live below the poverty line, of whom 7 per cent are ultra-poor.

Poverty is unevenly distributed between urban and rural areas, at 42 per cent and 58 per cent respectively, even though indicators show that urban poverty is increasing. *Nor are the poor* a homogeneous group: they can be divided into the privileged poor, the moderately poor and those who are at the very bottom of the heap. Generally, they tend to be occupied in marginal activities, low-wage workers or unemployed; are illiterate, live in inadequate housing, spend more on food and less on consumer goods, and are more likely to be women than men.

But for the poor, it is not how much food a family has that determines which category it fits into, but whether it has a high propensity to beg or seek charity or not. Poverty for the poor is equated with the feeling of humiliation, helplessness and powerlessness.

But powerlessness should not be equated with inertia and indifference. Ibrahim El-Issawi, professor of economics at the Institute of National Planning, rejects the myth that the poor are trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty characterized by self-indulgence and no desire to improve their conditions. "The poor are lacking neither the will nor the initiative to improve their status... it is not the 'culture of poverty' that hinders them from improving their livelihood, but sluggish growth, lack of jobs, inequality of income and wealth and inequality of opportunity."

Why do the poor think they are poor? From the survey, people listed unemployment, low or declining income, inflation, illiteracy or low levels of education, having too many children, and disabilities such as chronic disease or old age as the principle reasons behind their plight.

Surprisingly, when they were asked if the government could be blamed for poverty, only 23 per cent of the poor replied in the affirmative, although when asked should the government do anything to alleviate poverty, 94 per cent answered "yes". Issawi interpreted this as showing, firstly, that the poor do not make the connection between macroeconomic policy and the government, — between, that is, actor and action — and secondly, that they did not want to appear in open opposition to the government, and that it was seen as safer to say that the government has a role to play in alleviation

What do the poor do to make ends meet? The list is almost infinite, but El-Issawy *suggested* a few examples: adults overworking (long hours in the same job or on multiple jobs), or children dropping out of school (it's not that parents don't value education but when the going gets tough, it is a relief to be able to be spared school expenses and perhaps augment the family income *by having* the child join the labour force).

As for food, overcoming its scarcity requires some ingenuity, such as home-making pickles and home-processing food that would otherwise be expensive to buy in the market, reducing the number of meals a day, recycling left-overs and, of course, switching to cheap yet filling starchy foods such as *baladi* bread.

Other *coping* strategies include internal migration and informal savings groups, commonly *known as* the *gameya*, which are used to pay for all kinds of expenses ranging from school fees to marrying off a daughter or son or paying for an emergency health crisis.

Why are they poor?

Osman M Osman, professor of economics at INP and project co-ordinator for the Report suggests that if criteria other than income are adopted, the scale of poverty in Egypt would be even more dramatic than it *already is*. If the UNDP-formulated criteria, "capability poverty", is used as an index, the poor would be an enormous 34 per cent, compared to 23 per cent.

Capability poverty is measured according *to the proportion* of children under five who are underweight, the proportion of births unattended by a doctor, trained nurse or midwife, the proportion of female-headed households, population age six and over who has had no education.

This is the preferred index used at *the* INP, Osman explained, because using income as an indicator sheds no light on the standard and quality of life of income earners. "There are many families whose income is not low but who lead very poor lives".

The underlying motive behind using capability poverty as an index was also to show where the government has fallen short of providing the necessary services for the poor: "it obviously sheds light on the inadequacies in the system, but it also points to viable areas in which capability poverty can be significantly reduced if the gov*ernment were to commit itself to* certain objectives, such as the eradication of female illiteracy. If we concentrate on income alone, it means we are only looking at the market and its dynamics. These are important, but on a higher level the government has an equally important role to play in the regulation of the market, so as to provide welfare for the poor."

Surprisingly, while the percentage of rural poverty is still higher than in urban areas, it is the latter that is on the *increase, where it is largely con*centrated in the informal sector. This sector acts as a sponge soaking up the rejects of the formal sector, or as the HDR calls them, the "hard-core poverty groups", namely "those who have no access except to informal income-earning opportunities, or only to casual jobs".

The *size* of the informal sector, which is highly heterogeneous, is striking: 60 per cent of the workforce in urban Egypt undertake their economic activities in the backstreets, on the pavement, or as itinerants. In fact, they constitute about 70 per cent of the total workforce in Cairo. In the early 1990s, there were estimated to be 3 million people in the informal sector.

Osman emphasises that the informal sector is increasing because the private sector and the public sector still represent only a small proportion of the opportunities for economic expansion, especially at a time when the government is cutting back on its workforce. The situation is not improved by the fact that "the informal sector provides the last resort for labour migrating from the rural areas... which also creates problems of overcrowding and chaotic, haphazard housing", he said.

It is commonly thought that these *workers have opportunities to make a* staggering amount of money, being engaged in informal activities — but the truth, according to the Report, is that the majority do not make that much more than workers in the formal sector, because it is unlikely that they work for more than a few days in any one month. Living in such insecure circumstances, it is little wonder that many would rather work longer hours for a lower wage in the formal sector if they could.

Osman, however, does not attribute the increase in urban poverty to privatisation policies, because "up till now it has not led to any shedding of labour, and in the limited cases in which labour has been reduced through the early retirement scheme, adequate com*pensation was given. It is possible* that later on, some of these workers may not find new employment opportunities and may not be able to invest their compensation to provide a source of income — but so far, there is no correlation between privatisation and poverty amongst the workforce. Indeed, on the contrary, they may for a transitional period experience a boost in their living conditions because of their compensation... Moreover, real wages have indeed increased."

He also dismisses the idea that privatisation will increase the gap in income distribution or that it has done so so far. Distribution gaps are not so drastic, despite their social visibility, and the kind of wealth that is visible is restricted to a very small percentage. The richest are five times wealthier than the poorest, which is still not as great a gap as in other developing countries. For instance, in Brazil the ratio is 30, in the United States it is 17 times. For Osman, the key to poverty alleviation in Egypt is in national economic growth — because this is one country in which the rate of poverty is highly sensitive to rates of economic growth. "With enhanced growth and strong safety nets, poverty levels *could be reduced to 3-5 per cent*."

Farkhonda Hassan, chair of human development and local administration at the Shura Council, believes that while government efforts have been made in these last few years to combat poverty, the problem actually lies in "unjust economic growth. Inequitable distribution of the benefits of economic growth is intrinsically linked with problems of human development. By all human development indicators, the poor do not have adequate access to education and health," she reiterates.

Although the number of children enrolling every year at schools has improved, we cannot claim that there is total comprehensive enrollment at school. As for health care, indicators are anything but satisfactory, according to Hassan. "How can you alleviate poverty when people are suffering from illiteracy and sickness? The right to free access to education and health is guaranteed in the constitution, but in practice not everyone gets his or her constitutional rights. Although the government has been allocating more and more funds for health and education, it needs to double the budget because these two are the alphabets of development".

Hassan argues that privatisation may have a positive impact on the poor, as the government's responsibility towards creating job opportunities shrinks: "I am very optimistic that the private sector will take on this role of generating job opportunities fairly by law". But unless the private sector is regulated by the government to ensure it does create jobs, it is unlikely to do so on its own intiative. That is why for Hassan, it is necessary to establish the number of job opportunities generated as a principal criteria in allocating government licences to the private sector. The role of the government is changing, and as privatisation takes off, it should shift more towards concentrating on the provision of welfare services for the poor.

However. Karima Korayem, professor of economics at the Faculty of Commerce for Girls at Al-Azhar University is dubious of the scale on which the private sector will be able to generate employment opportunities that will directly benefit the poor in the years to come: "The private *sector* has been given many incentives for a long time now, since the *Infitah* [Open door policy launched by President Anwar El-Sadat in the mid-seventies], and we have not seen it generating high levels of employment, especially for the poor."

According to Korayem, privatisation will not have any significant impact on the large proportion of the poor employed in the informal sector. The same cannot be said for the low-income earners employed as labourers in the formal sector — "they *will definitely* be affected. Part of the labour force will certainly be shed, especially after the new Labour law is put in place, which will give the employer the right to get rid of some labourers in return for compensation".

People have already been laid off through the early retirement scheme, and the true impact of this measure on their lives is yet to be determined. Korayem argues that they may momentarily enjoy a boost in their living standard because of the lump sum, but she is highly doubtful whether they have the ability and background to make sound investment decisions: "It seems to me that these lump sums are likely to be spent on consumption and not on investment, which is why you shouldn't wait for them to come to you for investment advice, you should go to them."

There have not been many job losses so far because the government has only sold off profitable companies, and so was able to strike a deal in advance with the buyers to protect the labourers. Once it starts selling off the unprofitable companies, however, then it will have no say on the fate of the workforce: "You cannot have your cake and eat it too".

Korayem believes that the limited generation of new job opportunities coupled with shedding of unwanted labour means it is unlikely that, even if thousands are retrained, there will be a market for them. "It means that only the cream of the labour force will be used, and thus *the number of the poor relegated to marginalized jobs will increase*".

Mahmoud Abdel-Fadil, professor of economics at Cairo University, warns that the informal sector should not be seen as an autonomous sink which can act as the employer of the last resort, should all else fail. "There is a lot of idealisation of the potential role of the informal sector, yes it is a shock absorber and yes, it does help relieve the burden of poverty, but it is not a kind of sustainable solution."

One point often overlooked, says Abdel-Fadil, is that the dynamics of the informal sector are not completely independent of the dynamics of job creation in the formal sector. Yet whether the poor will reap the fruits of privatisation through a trickle-down effect depends greatly on the level of activity in the formal sector. If economic growth in the formal sector is sluggish, then we are likely to have a scenario where the poor in the informal sector will get poorer because available *employment* opportunities will be rationed even further.

"So, the casual worker who may work now three days a week will be working only one day a week," explains Abdel-Fadil, adding that: "if the economic reform does not translate into vigorous economic growth in two or three years maximum, then poverty will be on the rise."

This is one point all development experts agree on — the poor will have to keep their eye on the government and the wealthy, and hope they won't get poorer. The existing safety nets simply do not provide the kind of support that they are supposed to.

Perhaps it is a question of outreach — according to the HDR, only 18 per cent of the poor knew of existing institutions that were supposed to be at their service, ranging from the Social Fund for Development, to Nasser's Bank and the various NGOs. As a result, traditional safety nets, such as *zakat* and welfare, are still the most popular.

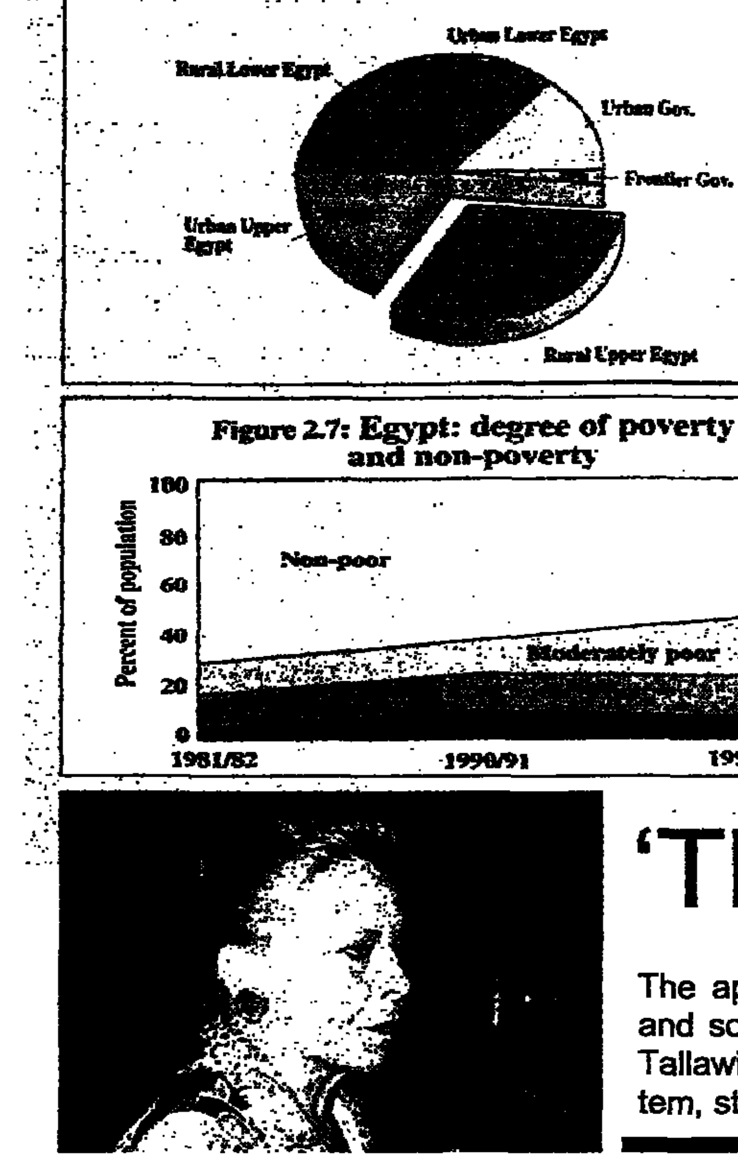


Figure 0.3: Rural and urban poor

num. of population (mill)

urban poor / rural poor

16, 14, 12, 10, 8, 6, 4, 2, 0

1990/91 — 1995/96

Figure 6.3: Proportions of female-headed households in urban and rural areas

% — F-headed HHs

20, 15, 10, 5, 0

Urban Gov. — Urban Lower — Rural Lower — Urban Upper — Rural Upper

'Think non-traditional'

The appointment of Mervat Tallawi as the new minister of insurance and social affairs brings with it the likelihood of wide-ranging reforms. Tallawi spoke to *Al-Ahram Weekly* about her plans to shake up the system, starting with the ministry's plan for the alleviation of poverty

The Ministry of Social Affairs has traditionally served as an umbrella for a multitude of agencies supposed to provide safety nets for the poor. Apart from the 14,000 NGOs registered with MOSA, there are also community development associations (CDAs) and local community societies working in co-operation with the ministry. There are also other semi-formal institutions, such as the Productive Families Project, established in 1964 and Bank Nasser, established in 1971, which are supposed to assist low-income earners.

The Productive Families Project has benefitted almost one million families in starting home industries such as tapestry-making as a means by which to generate more income. Bank Nasser's initial objective was to expand social equity through cash grants and loans. It is the only Bank authorised to receive *zakat*, or Islamic alms to distribute to the needy.

Different branches of the ministry are supposed to be concerned with targeting different underprivileged groups in society. Yet this role seems to have been greatly undermined in the last few years — with scandals of maltreatment and neglect in juvenile homes, *inadequate care for the disabled, etc*.

"The ministry considers the poverty alleviation plan to be its priority and its number-one target," announces Tallawi. Her own strategy for alleviating poverty begins in this way: "first of all, the philosophy of social development should be seen as real sustainable development, not as welfare or charity. The ministry of social affairs in many developing countries is seen to be targeting the poor by just giving some charity — in kind or in cash. This is the wrong perception of the role and objective of social development — social development is more sustainable than that. It should be a medium for developing the human being's capacities, regardless of the fact that he's poor or illiterate or helpless, unless there is a physical incapability. But even for the handicapped — you don't just give sympathy, you give dignity by giving, them the chance to be productive."

Tallawi says she hopes to refocus some of the initiatives which were initially intended to help the poor help themselves, but which ended in "absolute failure". To begin with, "it is not enough that I train people — the kind of training I give these people should be commensurate with the needs of the market and society." She intends to start with the 5,000 vocational training centers, to which she wants to give a new sense of purpose: "instead of sewing and knitting, they could be part and parcel of the industrialisation process in the country."

Tallawi is also critical of the concept of just giving people money to start their own enterprises: "I should help this person to use his money in the right way so as to produce something marketable. He cannot do market research, so it is my responsibility as part of the government to provide it. It should be the responsibility of a bigger institution than the individual to say what the items are that are needed in our market.

"If I continue to give this money and training to such traditional areas as carpet-making, or simply to sewing or knitting, and then they don't sell, the poor person will end up bankrupt. The whole project will be a failure. The whole purpose of giving him money, of training *him, will be doomed to fail*."

Tallawi suggests that perhaps local manufacturing should be redirected towards supplying local needs, which currently have to be met by imports.

But for Tallawi, targeting the poor does not necessarily mean alienating the rich, and she hopes that the direction of training and goods-production will be in line with the needs of the business community. "We should think non-traditional — what we do has to integrate with the rich and the private sector."

Tallawi says that she wants to direct welfare services towards what she calls society's "drop-outs": "It means that the ministry has a responsibility towards the juvenile delinquents, towards the addicts, towards prostitutes, street children, the senior citizens and the disabled, and orphans — we need to change both our mentality and the kind of service and priority we give to these people."

And how does she intend to help prostitutes? "You have to have legislation in order to save the family and to minimise as far as possible the difficulties that would force a woman to choose this kind of life."

In fact, Tallawi wants to reform all that she thinks is outdated: "I need to reform all the social laws, that is my dream, whether I can do it or not, I don't know — from the family laws to social security — we are still governed by some very old laws and I think it is about time that we changed."

Tallawi explains that working groups have been set *up to study these laws and that their reformed version* of the procedural personal status law will be amended during the next parliamentary session. "I was hoping that we would submit a substantive law reform before we submitted the procedural one, but...."

Tallawi is also especially concerned with female-headed households, "the invisible providers of some 20-25 per cent of families, even on the most modest estimates. The woman is the sole provider for these families — and that is why I always laugh when I hear chauvinists say a woman should stay home — who are they targeting? Who are they addressing? Who can afford to stay home — the few women who are educated? *— but certainly not the majority who are illiterate*," she says, outraged. Yet even middle-class families could not maintain their standard of living if women did not work, she adds.

Tallawi promises that changes to the social security laws will also be introduced, but warns that it may not happen so soon: "This is a tedious process — the pension laws are very complicated and cover many different groups, but it will take time to reform the whole thing — because it doesn't just involve legal people but actuarial people. But for those who are getting the Sadat pension, or the Mubarak, integrated, it is easier, we can do that alone, separately — at the end of next year, I hope."

She also hopes that an amended version of Law 32 of 1964 — the law which regulates the activities of NGOs in Egypt (long criticised for being out-dated, and too restrictive and bureaucratic) — will also be presented to the next parliamentary committee session.

The feminisation of poverty

WITH poverty more prevalent amongst female-headed households compared to male-headed households, *it is little wonder that a whole section of the* report is dedicated to the vulnerability of women. While the HDR estimates that female-headed households constitute 12.6 per cent of all households, other surveys put the figure at approximately a quarter.

According to the HDR, female-headed households constitute a substantial percentage of the poor. 86 per cent of them earn less than LE4,000 per household a year, compared with 66 per cent of their male counterparts.

Women often being the least skilled, least educated and most vulnerable, they tend to constitute a high percentage of those employed in the informal sector. Of the women interviewed, only 2.1 per cent said they worked in order to be independent and only 0.7 per cent for their future security. Working women *are not in the workplace for the fun of it, nor for em*powerment, but rather out of dire economic necessity — listed by 78 per cent of women as the reason behind their entry into the workforce.

Nehad Abul-Komsan, director of the Centre for Women's Rights, finds these findings to be completely convincing vis-à-vis poor women. "Women we work with in slum areas work just to survive, nothing more, they are forced to work in the informal sector under the worst conditions, and they know they have no say and no choice", she insisted.

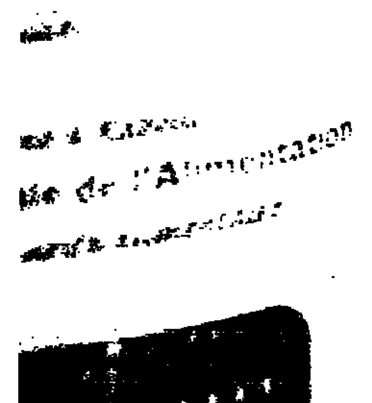
According to Abul-Komsan, working in the informal sector completely strips women of any concept of workers' rights — they work often from 9am to 10pm in tissue manufacturing or paper factories, getting paid according to the number of items pro*duced. Should they fall sick or should a member of* their family get sick, they risk losing their job or going hungry because of loss of income. The turnover in these places tends to be very high, says Abul-Komsan.

"And you have no idea what they are subjected to by the owner or boss, while they are on the job, which they never speak about so as not to get fired".

When the Centre for Women's Rights attempted to rally support amongst the women to demand their rights from the owners and take the matter to the Ministry of Industry, they were furious. What did she want to do, they asked, get them fired, and thrown out onto the street with no food?

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Al-Ahram Weekly

Lynch mob justice

In recent hearings at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, both the US and Britain again rejected Libya's call to have the two men charged with carrying out the Lockerbie bombing tried in a neutral country.

Before the World Court now is the issue of venue. The US argues that it has jurisdiction over the matter resulting from the fact that many of the 270 passengers and crew killed were US citizens, and that the airliner was American. But the obvious question is how could two Libyans receive a fair trial on US soil.

Furthermore, by rejecting the idea of holding the trial in a neutral country the US seems to be implying that justice — or at least what the Americans would call justice — cannot be guaranteed outside the borders of the 50 states. This form of justice, however, can more readily be likened to a desire to exact revenge. Does the US really expect anyone to believe that citizens of a country branded as a terrorist state, who are accused of terrorism, can receive a fair trial on US soil?

American officials, however, have remained unsurprisingly quiet about Netanyahu's terrorist plan to assassinate a leading Hamas figure in Jordan, once again proving that no matter what heinous crime Israel commits in the name of national security, only Arabs can be held accountable for their alleged actions.

Still, when it comes to diplomacy, the US's political forays into the regions reads like a litany of hypocrisy. It has imposed collective sanctions on Iraq and Libya, threatened sanctions on Sudan, chastised the Palestinians about security, but not once condemned Israel for any action — no matter how horrific.

If anyone is to blame for the mockery that has become of justice, then it is the US.

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A summit by any other name

Putting economics before peace is a classic case of cart and horse, writes **Amin Hewedy**

Negotiations are a marketplace in which the spoils of war are displayed. Wars cannot last forever; nor can wars of words. But the market is a callous place, filled with cold-hearted bargain-hunters intent upon getting the best possible deal for the nation they represent. They must be constantly on their guard, subjecting every offer to the closest scrutiny so as not to be duped into accepting faulty products. They must keep their cards close to their chest, to avoid being lured into emptying their pockets and walking out empty-handed.

The currency in this market is determined by the equilibrium between the balance of forces and that of interests during the phase in which the adversaries make the transition from armed confrontation to negotiations. This is a phase during which the armed forces are kept in reserve as a deterrent. An essential ground rule is that each party must realise that it is impossible to achieve absolute security at the expense of the others. The only option, if the negotiations are to remain on track, is to strive for a formula that ensures security for both sides.

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu is a good example of a haggler who has completely forgotten this basic rule. The lessons of history are lost on him. To him, security means Israeli security. His way of thinking implicitly constitutes a form of aggression against others. In his obstinacy, he has become the major stumbling block to a "rational settlement" based on a balance of interests and mutually guaranteed security, a formula which will realise the aspirations of today's generation and inspire future generations to uphold it and the stability it should bring about for all.

The Israeli prime minister is pushing the region into what Metternich termed a revolutionary state that subverts all universally-held principles of international legitimacy. By clinging to the philosophy of Jabotinsky, who believed that not only was it impossible to co-exist with the Palestinian people, but that the Jews must fight, defeat and expel them from Palestine, Netanyahu is living in a world where compromise and respect for the principles of international legitimacy are incomprehensible concepts. The issue, for him, is not to resolve international disputes given the current international system, since his beliefs contradict the very principles upon which that system is founded.

Diplomacy under these circumstances is to no avail since its underlying concept — the concerted attempt to restrain the use of force — crumbles if each side is speaking a different language and if the negotiating table is only an arena for hurling accusations, or for passing time until the next, inevitable military confrontation

Netanyahu still believes that Israel's overwhelming military force allows him to act as he pleases and to ignore the demands of the other side. It is a dangerous illusion. This can be readily understood by anyone who has seen the Israeli forces at work in Lebanon, where despite tanks, bombs and missiles, Israel lost 37 men in the past six months alone, or in the Palestinian territories as well as inside Israel itself, where stone-throwing youth and suicide bombings have created a climate of fear and instability.

If Netanyahu thinks that he can use the threat of Israel's supposed monopoly on the so-called nuclear deterrent in order to impose his conditions for peace, he could not be more mistaken. History offers numerous examples of nuclear powers defeated by non-nuclear powers. If he believes that his non-traditional biological and chemical weapons and his arsenal of missiles will serve to intimidate the other side, he should realise that, not only does the other side possess the same "toys", it is also motivated by its sense of right and justice. This lesson should have been driven home when he found even his conventional forces overwhelmed by the Palestinians' home-made arsenal. In his panic, however, he sends in his armies to inflict even more losses, causing himself further embarrassment before the international community, propelling his own government toward a precipice and undermining his own negotiating position.

The Palestinians, therefore, should not be too hasty in reaching an agreement. They would be rescuing him from the fate he has decreed for himself. Give him an inch, he will take far more than a mile, indulging in such stupidities as the assassination attempt on Khaled Misha'al and before the commando attack in southern Lebanon — another embarrassing failure.

If the true goal of any negotiating partner is peace, he must be fully prepared to make the transition away from war. This requires linking strategy to politics. It is pointless to talk peace without taking the steps to determine its form and the nature of the relations during the intermediary phases. Normalisation is a political, economic and cultural process. It cannot be achieved before reaching a solution for existing problems. Peace cannot be achieved through the economic sphere alone. To believe it can be is to put the cart before the horse. The fact that the Doha summit has been renamed the Doha conference in order to side-step the inviting Netanyahu to attend is a risible formality. Whatever it is called, the conference will not help the peace process. One cannot build a house without laying the foundations. Can an economic conference produce positive results when political conferences in Hebron, Jerusalem and Washington have only led from one failure to the next?

The writer is former defence minister and former chief of intelligence.

A conspiracy against Arafat?

In the light of the deal struck between Jordan and Israel which ensured the release of Hamas leader Sheikh Yassin, **Mohamed Sid-Ahmed** questions the credibility of the newly resumed negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority

Confounding predictions that the bungled attempt by an Israeli hit squad to assassinate a leading Hamas figure last month would drive the last nail in the coffin of the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, already stalled for the last nine months, Arafat and Netanyahu held their first face-to-face meeting in as many months. The resumption of the peace talks came in the aftermath of a controversial deal between Israel and Jordan: the release of Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, founder and spiritual leader of Hamas, from the Israeli jail in which he has been incarcerated for nine years, followed by the release of seventy more detainees, in exchange for the two Mossad agents who tried to kill Khaled Misha'al, chief of Hamas' political bureau and regarded by Israeli security agencies as the mastermind behind the spate of Palestinian suicide bombings inside Israel. The question is how such a morally ambiguous tradeoff can be reconciled with the resumption of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations meant to be conducted within the framework of the Madrid peace process and international legality.

Netanyahu has always maintained that fighting terrorism should take precedence over all other considerations. Today he has been caught red-handed committing a flagrant act of terrorism, in open defiance of international legality, ethics and the rules of civilised behaviour between states. It is now known that Netanyahu himself instructed Mossad to kill Misha'al, that Mossad tried to dissuade him and that he disregarded their advice. The Mossad agents sent to carry out the assignment used forged Canadian passports, leading Canada to recall its ambassador in Tel Aviv.

This raises the question of whether terrorism can be used to fight terrorism, that is, whether there is "good" terrorism as opposed to "bad", and, if so, what is the line of demarcation between them. The United States has listed a number of states, including Libya and Iraq, as terrorist. Syria too is included on the list, although Washington deals with Damascus as a partner in the peace process. But despite the fact that Israel has been caught *in flagrante delicto*, there is no question that it will ever be included on the list.

By definition, terrorism is a violation of law and of contractual agreements. This is not the first time Netanyahu is in clear breach of the provisions of existing contractual agreements. The most prominent example of his intransigence on that score is his very personal interpretation of Security Council Resolution 242, the cornerstone of the entire peace process, which is generally recognised as requiring the exchange of land for peace. Not so by Netanyahu, who has always maintained that peace can be achieved without restoring land. He has also questioned his obligation to remain bound by the Oslo Accords, on the grounds that they were signed by the rival Labour' Party, disregarding the fact that international agreements, not least when they are sponsored by other powers, supersede partisan politics and are binding on the state whatever the government in power.

But while Netanyahu's previous breaches of his commitments towards the peace process could have been subject to interpretation, this time the violation of the rules of the game is such that it calls the very credibility of the peace negotiations into question. For the terrorist act this time is not attributed to a dissident Palestinian organisation, but to Israel's top decision-maker.

The fact that Arafat and Netanyahu met for over two hours after the Jordanian-Israeli deal had been struck might appear strange, especially in the light of a statement attributed to Suleiman Najab, member of the Executive Committee of the PLO, who reportedly stated in a closed meeting of the Palestinian National Council that not all the elements of the deal had been disclosed. According to Najab, Jordan and Israel had come to a tacit understanding that Sheikh Yassin was better qualified than Arafat to undertake peace negotiations, because only he could put a stop to the campaign of terror launched by Hamas.

There are good reasons to believe that Najab's statement is well-founded. In a letter sent to Netanyahu just before the failed assassination attempt, King Hussein reiterated his previous advice to the Israelis to free Sheikh Yassin on the grounds that he was not opposed to the peace process. But Netanyahu took the king's advice only after the Mossad fiasco. It would seem that Arafat's decision to meet with Netanyahu was not due to an improvement in the relationship between the two men, as alleged by US special envoy Dennis Ross, but rather to his assessment that the resumption of security cooperation with Israel could eventually reveal elements in what he believed to be a conspiracy hatched against him, in other words, that a meeting with Netanyahu was a lesser evil.

There is no doubt that Arafat's removal would offer a number of advantages to Netanyahu, not least being more freedom of manoeuvre to cancel the agreements his predecessor concluded with the PLO and which he has often criticised. It is no secret that the Israeli authorities have created a special agency to monitor Arafat's health, and certainly they would prefer a tele-guided transfer of power to a random change determined by the balance of power in Palestinian ranks, given all the imponderables the latter scenario would involve.

It seems the Palestinian Authority is not the only party targeted. Is it just a coincidence that the issue of the disappearance in Egypt of former Libyan diplomat Mansour Kikhia three years ago is being raised now? Is Cairo too being targeted, whether because it is unlikely to sit idly by while the Palestinian Authority is replaced by Hamas, or because it has not responded to pressures to release convicted Israeli spy Azzam Azzam?

One argument now used to justify holding the Doha economic conference on schedule is that pan-regional economic agreements, i.e., the activation of a Middle East market, could eventually help overcome the difficulties in the way of reaching political agreements. Another version of the same argument is to call for a summit meeting between the protagonists along the lines of the 1978 Camp David Summit. But such a summit is more likely to consecrate and generalise the idea of informal deals informed by the balance of power between the parties than to uphold the provisions of international law and the principles which have so far governed the peace process. All in all, the current mood indicates that the Jordanian-Israeli deal, rather than the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, is more likely to become the decisive factor in shaping future developments, not only as regards the Palestinian issue, but in the peace process as a whole.

Indian summer

By Naguib Mahfouz

Strong links bind India, whose prime minister visited us this week, to Egypt. These ties date back to the days of Gandhi, when warm relations existed between the Congress Party and the Wafd. Nehru and El-Nahas were close, and their friendship was carried on and deepened by Nehru and Abdel-Nasser. India has always been an example of democracy in the Third World, and has maintained democratic methods no matter what party was in power at the time. Democracy has given India considerable economic benefits, enabling it to feed its enormous population. The democratic system has enabled India to become the first Third World nuclear power.

In fact, were it not for democracy, India would have broken up long ago. The number of races, religions and languages, with all their different customs and traditions, could have split the nation. Just as Pakistan broke away, other parts could have sought to form states based on religion and language. Democracy alone held the nation together, and remains the only viable way of governing it.

The message India sends out to all the Third World is that democracy is the solution; India disproves the idea that democracy can only flourish in advanced nations. India, like other developing countries, suffers from illiteracy and poverty, perhaps to a greater extent than certain others, but democracy has done great things.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

The Press This Week

Bibi — the bungling terrorist

Al-Ahali: "The failed attempt to assassinate Hamas leader Khaled Misha'al in Amman has caused uproar in Israel. Had the operation succeeded and the issue of the forged Canadian passports not come to light, the Israelis would have applauded loudly for the Mossad which, has quite a reputation for dirty operations of this kind. These 'special operations', as the Israelis call them, are the rule rather than the exception and are resorted to whenever there is Arab pressure on Israel. Where then does this pressure come from which led to the attempted assassination of Misha'al? And in Jordan, which has special ties with Israel? The answer is Netanyahu, a political figure 'who cannot think further than 24 hours ahead' according to one of the Israeli papers."
(Editorial, 10 October)

Al-Mussawar: "It seems that Netanyahu's brand of terrorism is different from that of the Hamas suicide bombers who are driven by extreme oppression to blow themselves up in the streets of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Netanyahu has punished Arafat and the whole Palestinian people for the failure of the PA to safeguard Israeli security in a way acceptable to him. Who then can punish the Israeli premier for the Amman crime which some international circles will undoubtedly describe as a legal defence of Israeli security?"
(Makram Mohamed Ahmed, 10 October)

Al-Gomhuria: "Even those Israelis who voted for Netanyahu are beginning to realise that he is leading them down a dangerous path which will take them back to the days of fear and isolation. The latest incidence of Netanyahu's extremism, regardless of the consequences, is the attempted assassination of Khaled Misha'al which caused a great scandal but has not embarrassed the Israeli leader, as if terrorism is in some way different if committed by Israel."
(Samir Ragab, 10 October)

Akhbar El-Yom: "Albright has drawn up a list of 30 organisations which she says are guilty of terrorism. And among these are the Palestinian Hamas and the Lebanese Hizbullah. How can resistance against a Nazi-like occupation be called terrorism? Are nations expected to surrender? The list does not include the world's greatest terrorist organisation, Netanyahu's government, even after the recent assassination attempt against a Hamas leader in Amman! What is worse is Netanyahu's defiant statement that his government will continue to assassinate its opponents [Arab of course] anywhere in the world. And so Hizbullah is condemned as a terrorist organisation, while Netanyahu receives full support from congress and the US administration!"
(Galal Aref, 11 October)

Al-Wafd: "What Netanyahu has succeeded in doing is to create the greatest scandal ever for the Israeli secret service. Netanyahu's crime in Amman has introduced chemical weapons to the Middle East conflict. And the US has refused to condemn Israel, Clinton himself refusing to comment, saying only that terrorism should be fought. This could only be interpreted as a vindication of the attempt to kill Misha'al."
(Sanaa El-Said, 12 October)

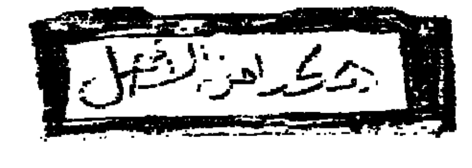
Al-Arabi: "Perhaps it was not within Jordan's capability to try the Mossad agents or set them free. Had Jordan behaved in the same way as Egypt did over the spy Azzam Azzam, Netanyahu would not have been able to be so impudent. Is it not logical that the UN should be asked to impose sanctions on Israel, like those in force against certain Arab countries, and to call on that country to extradite the head of Mossad for comitting an act of state terrorism?"
(Abdallah El-Sinawi, 13 October)

Al-Ahram: "It is not easy to understand the logic behind Netanyahu's attempt to liquidate Misha'al nor to surmise who could possibly believe him when he claims that he is combatting terrorism. What kind of euphemism would he use to describe state terrorism and cross-border spy adventures. Netanyahu is too stubborn to consider that he should resign or rethink his policies. If matters continue as they are, Netanyahu will not be in power for much longer. With that in mind, it may be best to give him more rope to hang himself with!"
(Assem El-Qirsh, 12 October)

Compiled by **Hala Saqr**



The prodigal son returns to freedom: Sheikh Ahmed Yassin's liberation has not erased the marks of fatigue and suffering from his face, lined like a map of Palestine. In their long history of struggle, the Palestinian people have learned the effectiveness of stones, and it is the impassive nature of a rock that I have brought to Sheikh Yassin's face: the impermeable quality of his gaze, the density of his full beard, and the intractability of his rugged features. Even his scarf, falling in folds around the worn face, is more reminiscent of a craggy landscape than of soft, pliant cloth.



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Lungs for the city

By the turn of the century, Cairo will be one of the world's modern capitals, thanks to one of this country's greatest achievements: the completion of the main network of the Cairo Metro. Cairo will become the first capital in the Arab world and, indeed, the Middle East, to possess a modern, efficient underground system.

The completion of the important phase inaugurated in October, which encompasses central Cairo, is a watershed in the construction of the underground because it connects Ramses Square to Ataba, Tahrir Square and Abdin. These districts are densely populated, with major traffic problems and a plethora of commercial enterprises and administrative buildings. Since it is so essential to millions of citizens, this part of Cairo really can be considered the pulse of our great capital.

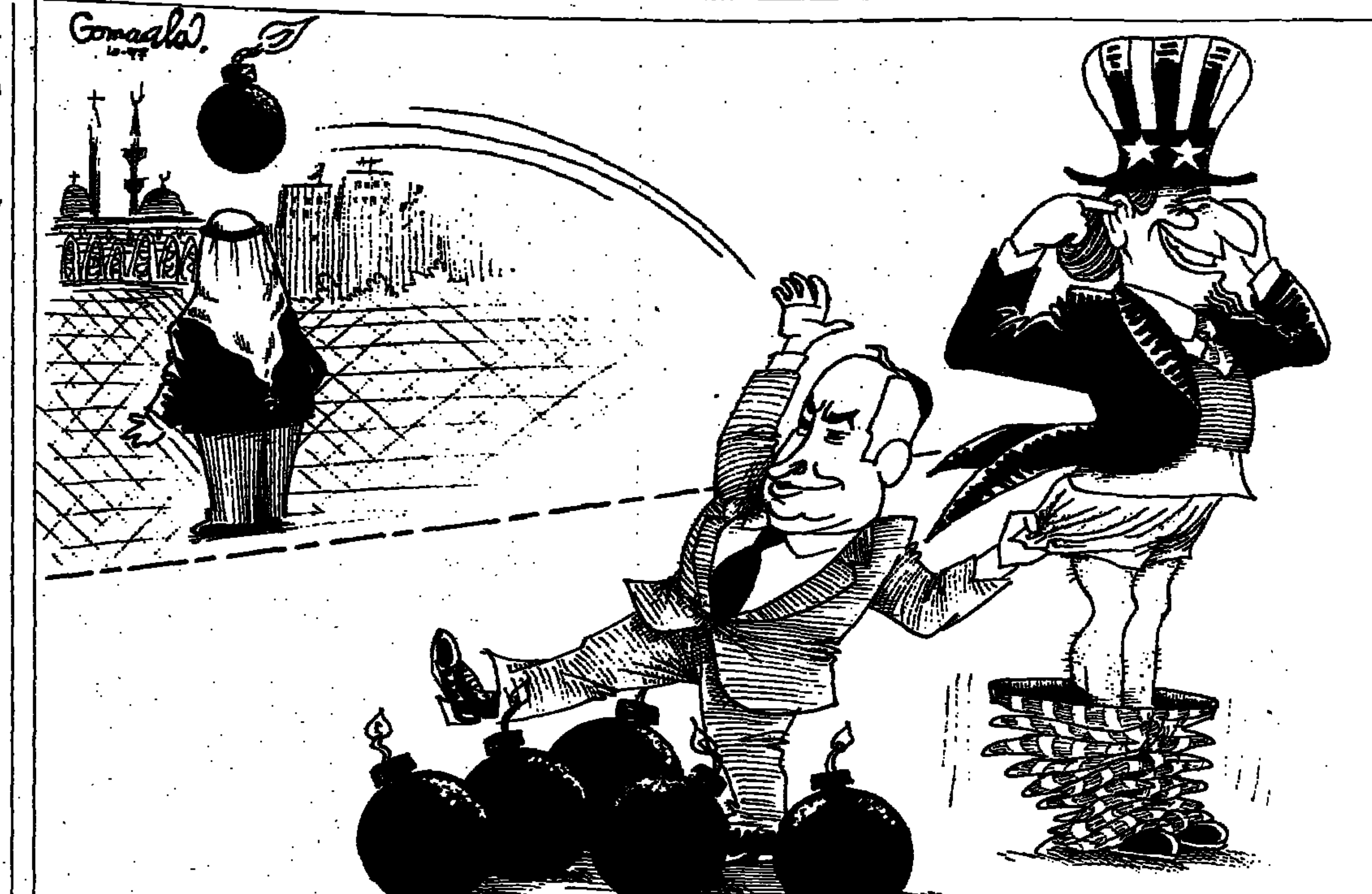
For years, the sword of Damocles hung over our heads: the threat of gridlock, the very real possibility that Cairo's traffic arteries would burst from the congestion. One felt that the sheer number of people and vehicles on the roads would choke the city and its inhabitants. The beginning of the Metro project a few years ago gave us all a reason to hope for a rejuvenation of the capital, the creation of a new city in the framework of a policy of structural transformation.

Parallel to the great revival brought on by the *extension and development* of the Metro network, it is essential that the Cairo Governorate establish pedestrian areas in the busiest zone and other commercial areas inside the city centre. Most of the world's capitals and large cities consider these pedestrian areas the lungs of the city. Commuters must now learn to park their cars outside the commercial areas and complete their journey into the centre via a clean means of transportation — i.e. the Metro. This would reduce the pollution that has turned the streets of Cairo into a breeding ground for many respiratory diseases.

Such a step would require radical new plans, such as the construction of multi-storey garages (possibly under ground) at certain intersections. Egypt has gained so *much engineering* and technological expertise from the Metro experience that it possesses all the requirements for large-scale projects of this nature, which would not only shelter thousands of cars during business hours, but could also become *shopping* centres for the millions of commuters using the Metro. These centres could also house postal and telegraph offices. This would decrease the congestion of the downtown area as a whole, revitalise the economy, and provide new jobs for the young. Finally, it would create the necessary space to plant and maintain greenery above ground.

Whether we wish it or not, the expansion of the Metro network and its new branches will bring about a cultural boom in Cairo, the equivalent of a heart transplant.

Cairo desperately needs numerous pedestrian areas. Cairenes need to use their feet once more and learn to think in new ways about collective benefits and the environment. Otherwise, we shall all suffocate.



Soapbox

When is a terrorist...?

In the wake of the botched attempt to assassinate Khaled Misha'al, the director of Hamas' Amman-based political office, an important point seems to have been overlooked. The international media have followed the US administration and the Israeli government in ignoring the issues at the heart of this crime, committed by the Israeli intelligence services. No one has described the crime as what it really is: a violation of Jordan's sovereignty, as well as an act of terrorism.

The US has imposed embargoes on several nations under the pretext that they support terrorism. If the US seeks any credibility, it must condemn all forms of terrorism. But US policy exempts Israel from any accusations of terrorism. The US has condemned neither the Mossad, nor other Zionist groups, including the two illegal Israeli terrorist organisations.

American researcher Catherine Christensen, a former CIA operative, has proved that Israel was founded on the basis of the genocide of the Palestinians. Yet the Israelis have never been punished for these crimes. The man who ordered the massacre of Kafr Qassem in 1956 paid a fine of one piastre for ordering the killing of 19 Palestinians.

Last week, Maurice Papon went on trial for crimes against humanity. Why have Menachem Begin, who boasted of his role in the massacre of Deir Yassin, or Rafael Etan, currently a member of the Knesset, and Ariel Sharon, the third minister in Netanyahu's government, both of whom were responsible for the massacres of Sabra and Shatila in 1982, never been brought to trial? Why is Netanyahu's role in the attempted assassination of Khaled Misha'al being swept under the carpet?



Mahgoub Omar

This week's Soapbox speaker is an expert on Palestinian affairs and a columnist with Al-Shaab *newspaper.*

In defence of democracy

The argument over the Copenhagen Declaration within the Press Syndicate, writes Abdel-Moneim Said, is an exercise in ostracism, not a free debate. Beneath the controversy, is freedom of speech at stake?

Friends have been urging me to respond to those who have attacked me personally for having participated in the International Alliance for Arab-Israeli Peace, more commonly known as the Copenhagen Declaration. Opposition to the Copenhagen Declaration has begun to exceed the bounds of a purely intellectual debate over how to contend with the Arab-Israeli conflict and has developed into a campaign of personal harassment and character assassination. The campaign is no longer confined to the press, but has moved to the Press Syndicate, which has instigated punitive procedures. It has already reprimanded me and the investigation *it has set into motion may well lead* to disciplinary actions as grave as dismissal from work and deprivation from writing in the press.

It was embarrassing at times to see many colleagues, most of whom had opposed our initiative, *speaking out on behalf of Lutfi El-Kholi and myself* in order to defend our right to express our opinions and to act on our political beliefs. We, meanwhile, remained silent in face of the personal attacks and the measures taken by the Press Syndicate Council. *It was not our intention* to demonstrate any sense of aloofness or disdain. Rather, we believed that our actions in Copenhagen, at heart, served national and Arab interests and that we should not, therefore, let ourselves be drawn into tangential squabbles, particularly as the Copenhagen initiative, alongside our other commitments, consumed so much of our time and effort.

More importantly, to me, was that the Copenhagen initiative was an integral part of a comprehensive conceptual scheme which I have been advocating for the past fifteen years and which is just as controversial today as it was in the past. I was not prepared to let the trees blind *me to the forest, so to* speak. I did not want to be distracted from the core principles of the heated controversy that has been raging in our society since the beginning of the '70s and that intensified in the early '90s. Perhaps I was keeping *in mind President Truman's* famous saying 'If you can't take the heat, don't go into the kitchen.' I went into the kitchen and found a hornets' nest, and have had to endure both the heat and the stings.

The reason I am writing now, however, is not merely in response to the request of my colleagues at *Al-Ahram Weekly* but, rather, because the issue in its entirety has gone beyond individuals and even personal ideological orientations to imperil the future of freedom and democracy in our country. Until recently, we had thought that freedom and democracy were part of the process of give and take *between the state and society, but we now find these principles being buffeted by the interactions* between the individuals and *institutions of civil society itself.*

Indications of this process were already obvious in the attempts of the fundamentalist trend to curtail public liberties and the freedom of opinion through the *hisba* laws which *claimed as their victim* Nasr Hamed Abu Zeid. No one, however, could have imagined that this tendency could extend to the Press Syndicate in the form of a new *hisba* case, involving not the interpretation of the Qur'an but the doctrine *of Arab-Israeli* conflict. One can only fear that this intervention precedes similar interventions in other domestic or foreign issues in which syndicates take it upon themselves to bring to *trial all* those who are at variance with their doctrine of political beliefs *and action.*

For the record, I put this opinion to the Press Syndicate Council in response to the reprimand that it had served against Lutfi El-Kholi and myself last March. We proposed that the syndicate hold a series *of dialogues*, debates and workshops so that we could present our ideas in a climate that would be conducive to a calm and rational interchange and that would enable the members of the syndicate to hear all points of view. The council never responded *to our request* and, after a long period of silence, it announced last August that it would instigate hearings against us, although it neither set a date for these hearings nor clarified the procedures. It so happened that the head of the syndicate and several members of the council were *absent during* that meeting. More significantly, there has been no *prior* consultation with the syndicate's legal adviser.

For our part, we responded to the council's notification with a letter seeking clarification with regard to our alleged offense and the *legal grounding* for the investigation. We asked whether the investigation was based on the constitution, public law or the laws of the syndicate itself, and whether any precedents served the council in these proceedings. We knew, as the members of the council certainly knew, that dozens of journalists had acted as we had, whether in the course of their work or because they were convinced that a dialogue with the advocates of peace in Israel was necessary. When, once again, the council did not respond, we submitted a legal memorandum in which we observed that, according to the constitution, the rulings of the supreme constitutional court, public law, the rulings of jurists and syndicate law, there was no legal basis for the measure instigated by the syndicate council which, up to the present, continues to hold its silence.

Perhaps, at this juncture, it is important to stress that Lutfi El-Kholi and myself hold the syndicate and its council in the highest regard. We had the honour to participate with it in the defence of press *freedoms during what became known as the battle* of Law 93, in which democracy and freedom of the press won the day. But we believe, equally strongly, that neither we nor the Press Syndicate Council are above the law, which draws a clear distinction *between a syndicate and a political party, and* according to which the syndicate can only instigate disciplinary procedures against those who have violated professional ethics and the journalistic code of honour. The council's action made no reference to any such allegations. More importantly, it violated all the Press Syndicate's established traditions of press freedom which, we have no doubt, will win out in the end, and which has made of the syndicate a true champion of freedom of opinion and expression. These are the traditions which I sought to defend in my interview with *Ha'aretz* last June, although some critics completely distorted my words, portraying them as an attack on the syndicate and its established traditions.

We must all realise, however, that the issue at hand has far greater implications than the legal foundations of the council's decision and the extent *to which it has violated the syndicate's established* tradition of advocating the intellectual and political freedom of its members. These matters can be settled among the members of the syndicate, or *in* court. The fact is that we have put to Egyptian political society a new means of realising Arab demands in the Arab-Israeli conflict: the creation of an international alliance of all forces that support the Israeli withdrawal from occupied Arab territories and the establishment of a Palestinian state.

While the initiative sparked debate, and in some instances acrimony, however, the idea itself was frequently submerged in an intricate web of other issues. *It was impossible to isolate the dialogue from* a host of developments that have taken place in the Arab-Israeli conflict since the beginning of the decade, particularly in light of the unprecedented tensions that have resulted from the policies of the Israeli *government* under Netanyahu.

Nor was it possible to isolate the issue from a range of other issues that had preoccupied the intellectual arena for decades. Suddenly, old bones of contention were unearthed, and we found ourselves wrangling over Abdel-Nasser versus Sadat, the dis*solution of the public sector and the role of the pri*vate sector, and even the new globalism. It was impossible to keep the tenor of dialogue above the traditions that prevail in Egyptian and Arab discussions in general and, as is customary, accusations were hurled back and forth. Gone were the boundaries between rational debate and personal abuse; intolerance reached such levels that some demanded the exclusion, from the syndicates and political parties, of those who had strayed from the orthodox view.

In spite of this all, the dialogue did have its positive aspects. Above all, a great impetus was given to the principle of tolerance for opposing views when an elite group of respected writers and intellectuals defended freedom of opinion and the right to differ. It was heartwarming to see that, during public meetings on the Copenhagen Declaration, the vast majority of those present were, first, eager to learn about the proposed alliance and its implications for national and Arab interests and, second, fully prepared to oppose all attempts to generate a climate of intellectual terrorism. In short, in spite of the moments of tension, freedom of opinion in Egypt successfully passed a truly arduous test.

It was also encouraging to see that entire schools of thought were inspired to seriously consider the notion of a grass-roots alliance for peace rather than spouting the customary ideological formulas. Although some tenaciously continued to advocate the "*struggle for existence, not borders*" and therefore, by definition, had little to contribute, others were prepared to suggest, for example, the notion of a secular democratic state as a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli dilemma. The idea, it is true, was *advocated by the PLO in the mid-'70s.* But its revival in the course of a discussion on the role of intellectuals in an international alliance for peace brought to the fore a gamut of questions, not least of which the means of establishing it and whether or not Israelis should be brought into the discussions. Needless to say, secular democratic states cannot be founded upon groups who refuse to speak to each other and who are unaware of their mutual suspicions and apprehensions. We may also presume that advocates of such a set-up will themselves have democratic, secular attitudes. The crucial issue is that, *even when faced with vehement opposition,* discussion of the Copenhagen Declaration compelled all parties in the intellectual arena to put forward their conceptions and goals, instead of mouthing the usual formulas.

Perhaps the most important issue in the dialogue was the question of how to bring about peace in the region. Although all participants clearly supported peace, sharp differences emerged over the quality of such a peace and the means of achieving it. While *some condemned the entire peace process, from* UN Security Council Resolution 242 to the recent Hebron agreement, others believe that the process, however difficult, is the only available way of ensuring that an acceptable number of Arab interests are met.

Behind these differences of opinion were divergent views regarding the impact of the Arab-Israeli conflict on other pressing concerns in Egypt and the Arab world, such as development and the global economic struggle. While opponents of the peace process believe that keeping up the struggle will revolutionise Arab societies and deliver them from economic dependency and submission, its proponents believe that our *other national aspirations* can only be achieved under conditions of peace and stability. In other words, the dialogue over the Copenhagen Declaration has made it clearer than ever that the nation must set its priorities quickly.

Of no less consequence is the fact that the discussions brought to the fore a set of questions which the intellectual community must earnestly seek to answer. Heading the list is the influence of the peace camp inside Israel. While supporters of the Copenhagen Declaration hold that there is a significant body of opinion inside Israel, ranging from the Arab Israelis to the political centre and even to the fringes of the Israeli right, that supports peace and is capable of advancing the interests of peace in the region, opponents assert that this notion is an illusion. The presence of a peace camp inside Israel, therefore, is a prime subject for empirical study. We *must apply the appropriate methodology in an*alysing Israeli opinion polls, press commentary, party platforms, and party and mass actions.

Differing views over the size and potential influence of the peace camp inside Israel gave rise to another, more heated, dispute, this time over the *question of whether Arab intellectuals should actively engage Israeli peace activists in dialogue and work with them toward peace. To the supporters of* the Copenhagen Declaration, the idea is a good one *in light of the changes that have taken place inside Israeli society, in the region and on the international* scene. We also perceive that it would be advantageous to tap the growing influence of public opinion and non-governmental grassroots movements. At any rate, we argue, closer contact with the Israeli peace camp will enable us to assess *its* strengths and weakness on the ground, certainly an improvement over fiction and hearsay.

Critics, however, argue that a dialogue with Israeli peace advocates would entail an implicit surrender of the last pressure card the Arabs hold: normalisation. They have yet to explain how the entire Arab nation, with its human resources and diverse economic and military capacities, has only one card left to play. It would be equally interesting to understand how a player with a single card left can refuse to play it and remain in the "game." At the same time, they have yet to come up with a single proposal for practical political action apart from the customary Egyptian and Arab meetings in order to reiterate the pleas *for Arab solidarity and Arab unity* as a solution to the present crises.

Clearly, this group has excluded any political alternative that extends beyond the Arab world to Israel, Europe and elsewhere in the world. Although *they always advocate appealing to international pub*lic opinion and seeking more active European participation, they have yet to explain how this might be possible without engaging Israeli peace advocates in dialogue, a step which the effective inter*national political forces perceive as fundamental to* the peace process in the region.

Having abandoned all forms of political action, members of this group have found themselves, consciously or unconsciously, prey to military solutions. *Some suggest* that the Arab armies liberate the occupied territories and that guerrilla operations resume on all fronts. Some, in their zeal, have gone so far as to insist that the struggle against Israel should extend to the US, the root of the whole calamity. Of course, a return to military, or even paramilitary, footing will implicitly revoke the Israeli-Egyptian and *Israeli-Jordanian peace agreements and* the Oslo Accords, and bring Israeli troops back into the recently-evacuated Palestinian territories. At any rate, since their solutions inevitably lead to violent struggle, it would only be considerate to consult the *people, directly or through their representatives,* since it is ordinary people, after all, who would have to pay the price for such decisions.

If empirical study can shed light on the extent of the influence of the peace camp inside Israel, the *same cannot be said of the question* of whether the Copenhagen Declaration represents the Palestinian people's opinions. On one hand, the declaration was supported by a freely and democratically elected Palestinian leadership. Indeed, the majority of the Pal*estinian political* and *intellectual elite*, representing virtually all the ideological trends, supported the declaration, and many participated actively in its formulation. In addition, all the *Palestinian* public figures, in the PNA and outside it, who visited Cairo, called upon Egyptians and Arabs to visit them, regardless of the taint of "normalisation", and stressed the importance of engaging the Israeli peace camp in *dialogue as a way to compound the pressures on the* Israeli government, which is trying to evade the peace process. They added that tangible contacts would help alleviate the enormous pressures on the people in the Occupied Territories and simultane*ously lend weight to the Israeli peace camp,* which suffers a political disadvantage due to the lack of Arab recognition.

On the other hand, many participants in the debate over the Copenhagen Declaration rejected the Pal*estinian position entirely*, both with regard to their support for the declaration itself and with regard to the peace process as a whole. In so doing, they have pulled the carpet out from under the PLO, the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people.

Beneath the contention over Copenhagen, public opinion is thus faced with yet another conundrum. How are we to deal with the *PLO*? While many believe that we should grant the PLO the absolute right to determine its own strategy and tactics, and back its decisions, as we have done for all other Arab liberation movements, others view the Pal*estinian cause as an exception.* Determining the fate of the Palestinian people, they think, is the right of the Arab masses from Mauritania to Qatar. The fact is, however, that no one really knows how the masses might deal with the Palestinian cause. What they seem to be implying is that the Palestinian cause should be handled by Arab political regimes *as was the case in the past, when every Arab state had its own Palestinian affairs organisation* and every Arab political movement had its own Palestinian liberation grouping. If we eliminate the possibility that they might also have been suggesting that the Palestinian cause should be handled by various Arab writers' and artists' unions, we are left with the sorry historical reality that the Arab regimes' handling of the Palestinian cause was *unsuccessful at best, and not infrequently* precipitated Palestinian civil warfare.

The experiences of all national liberation movements around the world demonstrate that a single, central, legitimate, popularly accepted authority must be at the helm. Until *now, no one has offered any* evidence that such an authority exists outside the PLO. In any event, the issue now rests with public opinion, which has been exposed to the spectrum of views.

These, then, are the *main issues that arose during* the debate over the Copenhagen Declaration. Certainly, the debate strayed to a range of other tangential questions and at times it seemed to be a dialogue of the deaf. Ultimately, however, I believe *that the public is now aware of the options before it.* The public must make the crucial decisions that will effect our future. This is the fundamental mission of journalists: to present the public with the facts and to stimulate debate over crucial national issues. When the Press Syndicate Council moves to impose sanctions against proponents of one side of the debate, it is essentially trying to rig the game, undermining the principles of honest journalism, obstructing the road to freedom and democracy and preparing the ground for the imposition of one view. Is this what the council really wants? Or do the proponents of a particular ideological trend, finding themselves incapable of rational argument, feel compelled to resort to bureaucratic measures to succeed where their mental powers have failed?

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'We will always be here'



In the second part of his study of the Intifada paradigm, **Abdelwahab Elmessiri** explains how a loosely cohesive model allows the Palestinians to create new impetus for resistance every day

The Intifada represents a rare moment of victory in the Arab struggle. I have therefore decided to focus my attention on what I have come to call the "Intifada paradigm."

The word Intifada itself is etymologically grounded in Arab Islamic culture. Its root meaning is derived from the verb *nafada*, meaning to shake out the dust. As such, it conveys the sense of an act of regeneration (cleansing) while simultaneously implying the refusal to permit the unwanted substance — dust, or in this case, the Zionist occupation — an opportunity to become imbedded. From the verb *nafada* comes the idiom *nafada al-tariq*, meaning to cleanse the road of thieves and highway robbers, as well as the noun *al-nafada*, a scouting party or a reconnaissance patrol deployed in an area in order to warn of potential enemies or other dangers. The root *nafada* also conveys the sense of fertility. *Al-mar'at al-nufud* is a woman capable of prodigious childbearing (like Palestinian women). Other idiomatic derivations from the root include "to shed lassitude", "to shake off cares" and "to shoot up out of one's seat." In short, the word carries connotations of a latent energy that is suddenly activated, not by some external agent, but from within.

Although the causes for the Intifada were always there, it only erupted in 1987. There are several reasons for this. The intensity of Zionist repression of Arab citizens increased every year. The very act of repression, however, imposes a structural relationship that poisons the relationship between the colonisers and the colonised. Along with the distortion of Palestinian society and the destruction of the infrastructure that this entailed, the linking of Palestinian society to the Israeli economy took place rapidly. Indeed, one Israeli scholar observed that, on one level, the West Bank was so tightly integrated into the Israeli economy that there could be no turning back. In order to raise the living standards of the inhabitants of the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967, the occupation authorities sought to transform large sectors of the population into a source of cheap labour for Israel. It was hoped that by generating this dependency on the Israeli economy, the Palestinian workers would want to retain the status quo.

Eventually there were some 120,000 Palestinians working behind the Green Line (which hypothetically divides the territories occupied in 1967 from those occupied in 1948). The average income of Palestinian Arabs rose from approximately $300 to $1,400 per annum in the West Bank and $1,000 in Gaza. In part, the increased income levels were also due to remittances from Palestinians working abroad. Consequently, rising standards of living were not the product of the Palestinians' connection with their land and their labour on that land. Rather, they were generated by migrant labour (either inside Israel or in other Arab countries). In other words, the pull of higher incomes outside Palestine generated a force that drove Palestinians from their homeland and compelled them to abandon the armed struggle.

For its part, the US sought to implement some economic programmes in the West Bank in order to instil a sense of complacency and material comfort that would divert the Palestinians from their national values and moral imperatives. One of the most important obstacles to these plans was the ideological crisis that beset the Zionist state itself as a result of rising secularism and the spread of material values. Israeli settlers were themselves deviating from their Zionist ideals. No longer were they willing to get dirt under their fingernails in order to make a living. Arab labour could do that for them. Compounding this development was the growing crisis of Jewish identity, which gained particular urgency in light of Israel's major demographic problem: the reluctance of Western Jews (whether from the US or the Soviet Union) to settle in the "promised land".

Zionism's ideological crisis is embodied in the settlement process. In spite of the incentives and the billions of dollars spent on settlements, only about 130,000 Israelis had settled in the Occupied Territories after 30 years of occupation. Most of the settlers commute to work behind the Green Line. That none of the settlers are of Sephardic or Oriental origin epitomises the identity crisis. Clearly, there is not a single "Jewish people" but disparate groups of Jews, each bound by their own set of interests and outlooks. For the Israelis who do settle, the impetus comes not from ideological or religious inspiration, but rather from the prospects of higher living standards offered by the settlements. Advertisements for housing in the settlements say nothing about the promised land and the deliverance of the Jewish people. They focus on the luxury of the accommodations and the sports and recreation facilities, all at relatively low rates (a home in the West Bank costs about $100,000).

Oppression alone, therefore, did not give rise to the Intifada; nor was the crisis within the oppressors' society a sufficient cause. Certain positive elements also led the Palestinians to the realisation of the decay setting in within the enemy's society, and the impetus for life and renewal among the Palestinians themselves. The decisive factor, in my opinion, is the cohesiveness of Palestinian identity, deeply rooted in its cultural and religious heritage. This was the inexhaustible resource which enabled the Palestinian people to realise their potential and identify their enemy's weak points. It allowed the Palestinian resistance to preserve the spirit of the Palestinian popular struggle. This cohesion also made it possible for new generations of Palestinians to realise what was occurring within Israeli society and to develop new and original means to contend with these developments. Eventually, the defeat of the Israeli forces in Lebanon revealed the possibility of inflicting another defeat on the enemy, this time in the realm of the Israelis' dreams and their attempts to give these dreams shape on the ground.

At one extreme of an abstract social continuum is the atomised society, a model that hardly serves as a revolutionary paradigm. At the opposite end is the model of organic integration, in which the constituent elements are so cohesively bound and interdependent that there can be no scope for autonomous action. This is the prevalent revolutionary model throughout the world. The notion of non-organic integration, on the other hand, allows for a measure of leeway between the whole and the part, and between the various constituent parts.

The Arab Islamic heritage, like any cultural formation, contains both organic and atomised models. At its core, however, is the model of non-organic integration. Loose, non-organic integration is the model underlying the Palestinian Intifada against the Zionist enemy. It contrasts sharply with the model for organic integration which has been the traditional model for revolution, modernisation and Westernisation in the Arab world. Organic integration requires total coordination within the framework of a body of strictly applied laws. All parts must be homogeneous, and comply with the law and central authority. Because of its rigidity, this model is capable, under ideal circumstances, of movement in one direction only. It must always move forward. It cannot afford to stop. Yet it is bound to stop, since total control and total homogeneity cannot be achieved at all times.

In the non-organic model for integration, however, total control is not necessary. On the contrary, it can cause more harm than good. The model of non-organic integration may not work as quickly or efficiently as the model of organic integration, but it has far higher potential for mobilisation and self-perpetuation. The Intifada recruited a mass of human beings (men and women of all ages, classes and religious affiliations) within the Occupied Territories and activated them all, in accordance with the ability of each. Movement was neither steady nor homogeneous.

The Intifada provided a large scope for individual initiative, transforming spontaneity into an original and powerful form of resistance that could be easily absorbed within the loose central planning framework. After all, throwing stones does not require particularly stringent tactical coordination, high levels of training or lengthy revolutionary induction sessions. The Intifada rallied the Palestinian people around fundamental human values such as love for one's native land and the right to self-determination. It did not concern itself with abstractions and the finer points of revolutionary theory.

The model of non-organic integration compensates for its lack of speed with its ability to survive under most circumstances and to resume action again after an interruption. The Intifada had so worn out the enemy that Israeli strategists were convinced that the only way to put an end to it was to go around it. Hence Madrid and Oslo. General Hassan El-Badri, the historian of the Egyptian army and one of its most important strategists, once told me that if an organised army has to continue its suppression of a civilian uprising for more than a year, it will lose its ability to fight and discipline within the ranks will break down. This is precisely what occurred in occupied Palestine. He also said that if a civil disobedience movement can continue for more than six years it can continue forever, because it will have established all the alternative institutions necessary for managing society. In this sense, the Intifada was a victory for civil society in the face of the centralised state.

The outbreak of the second Intifada is further proof of the capacity of this model to regenerate itself and to flare up again after a period of abatement. The genius of the Intifada resides in "de-modernisation", or a resurgence of traditional forms of social unity and production. The least modernised villages resist the most fiercely: their traditional infrastructure guarantees them a greater capacity for perseverance because they are not as economically dependent upon the state.

The word Intifada, therefore, is more accurate than "revolution" to describe these facts. Revolution conveys the sense of an abrupt reversal, whereas Intifada implies that latent energies have surfaced. The aim is not to interrupt a continuity, but rather to resume what has been interrupted. The Intifada is a model for a movement to transform Israel into Palestine once more. If this is the objective, it is no coincidence that the Intifada and the prevalent modes of social awareness in traditional societies should have several features in common. We have already referred to the fact that the Intifada derives considerable impetus from its adherence to fundamental human values. To a great extent it shares this characteristic with traditional societies, in which there is a higher degree of cohesiveness because of the faith in fundamental and immutable principles.

The organic paradigm is characterised by a strong centre and weak peripheries. The vanguard, armed with revolutionary consciousness, is destined to lead the masses to the promised land. Once the centre disintegrates, however, the peripheries flounder and the system loses all definition and momentum. In the non-organic paradigm, by contrast, the centre is not necessarily stronger than the peripheries. Therefore, if something happens to the centre the peripheries will not be profoundly affected since they have retained their autonomy.

This cohesiveness among distinct entities in a group enables it to perform without daily directives from on high and without the need for rigid party control and discipline. The Intifada was organised in this fashion. Whenever a leader was arrested, the remainder of the group was able to continue and even escalate the fighting, as if to tell the enemy that they had caught the wrong person. Arrests only contributed to increasing the solidarity and stamina of the protesters. Cohesion, moreover, has enhanced the ability of the group to select those leaders who are the most capable, talented and creative.

Also, in contrast to the model of organic integration, the loosely structured non-organic model, much like traditional societies, seeks to conserve its resources. The stone is not a product of a culture given to disposable consumable goods. It does not have to be imported from abroad, it can not be confiscated, and it is recyclable.

In the same way, the resistance is able to renew itself. Prisons have been transformed into the academies for the Intifada. Not infrequently, training can be very practical: inmates organise strikes which in turn increases their solidarity. When a prisoner is released, he or she is welcomed back into the neighbourhood as a hero, a new model for the resistance. Prisoners, in a sense, serve the same function as martyrs. When a martyr falls, his funeral becomes an occasion for collective prayer and his martyrdom becomes another means of increasing group solidarity. In this sense, the martyr is a source of renewed energy.

Given its virtually inexhaustible resources, therefore, the Intifada can remain perpetually alive. Like an ember, it may glow with varying degrees of intensity, but it cannot be extinguished. As a model for resistance, this too has clear advantages. The Intifada makes it possible to continually harass and humiliate the enemy without giving him the pretext to open fire or resort to mass-extermination. Stones may inflict pain, but they are not weapons of murder. If a stone-thrower is caught (particularly in the presence of the television cameras, when the enemy can only use his military hardware very surreptitiously since he has to uphold his media image as a champion of democracy), he will most likely be able to escape or ensure his release. After all, this particular weapon is impossible to pin to a specific assailant. In this perspective, the Intifada model lies somewhere between the Vietnamese model of resistance and the Indian model of peaceful civil disobedience, although it is possible for the Intifada to operate within the scope of either of these models. Here too, it draws on available resources without deviating from the overall strategy, which is ultimately to convey to the enemy a single message: "We are here, and we will always be here."

The accumulation of collective expertise has enabled the Palestinians to organise an extraordinary number of strikes and protests without exhausting themselves. The Intifada leadership also permits stores and other services to operate for several hours a day, showing that it is fully aware of the need to continuously activate every part of the collective body. People's human needs must be satisfied. They have to eat, drink, rejoice and mourn. In the Intifada, they have broken the grasp of prosaic time, not by destroying time and themselves (as Prometheus would have it), but by working with time and accepting it as a given, developing their expertise day by day, and solidifying their solidarity and mutual compassion. What can an enemy, no matter how skilled and efficient, do to counteract this?

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Why democratisation stalled?



The reasons why the Arab world remained largely immune to democracy's "third wave" are many, writes **Mustafa Kamel El-Sayed** in the second part of this study, but culture is not one of them

In many ways, Arab countries have been the apparent exception to a pattern that dominates other regions, where authoritarian and "totalitarian" regimes have fallen, ushering in governments elected under reasonably fair conditions. It is commonplace now to call this move away from authoritarianism the third wave of democracy, an expression coined by American political scientist Samuel Huntington.

This apparent deviation has led some scholars to speculate on the Arab world's specificity. Even those who reject this idea, however, cannot explain why a wave of democratisation has not swept over the Arab world.

Authoritarian regimes certainly thrive on divisions within the political elite. If members of the ruling elite accept to disagree on questions of substance related to their respective political platforms, but agree at least on the procedure of the occupancy of political office, this could open the way for the emergence of a liberal political order. This, indeed, was the argument of several contributors to the volume edited by Ghassan Salameh, including the editor himself. The title of that volume, which deals with the question of transition from authoritarianism in the Arab world, is, interestingly enough, *Democracy without Democrats*.

A major cause of discord within the political liberalisation is the position of Islamist groups within the political process. Disagreement on this issue has prevented the integration of the Islamists within a constitutional political process in such countries as Algeria since 1992, Tunisia and Egypt. Those opposed to the recognition of the Islamists as a legitimate political force are not limited to the ruling elite, but include important sections of the liberal and Marxist opposition, particularly in Egypt and Tunisia, who are apprehensive about the Islamist understanding of freedom of belief, conscience, thought and expression, particularly since their practices in the countries they have ruled do not inspire much optimism in this respect. Intellectuals have been assassinated by groups claiming to act in the name of Islam in Algeria, and several secularist intellectuals have been assaulted, verbally or physically, in Egypt.

It is true that one can find statements by leaders of Islamist organisations, particularly mainstream Islamist movements, in Tunisia, Algeria and Egypt, implying respect for the rules of political pluralism. Such statements, however, cannot dispel the feeling among liberal and leftist groups that respect for democracy is only a smoke screen intended to comfort sections of Arab public opinion, and will be disregarded once the Islamists come to power and have no need for alliances with secularist groups.

More radical factions within Islamist movements in the three countries mentioned, furthermore, do not accept the positions of mainstream leaders. Recent experience, at least in Algeria and Egypt, has demonstrated that these leaders do not really control the actions of the more radical factions.

In any case, there are no signs that these collective actors, no matter how committed they are to the cause of democracy, are moving along lines that would bring them to a democratic compromise. Evidence drawn from the Egyptian, Tunisian and Algerian cases points to the determination of the ruling groups in these countries to exclude the Islamists completely from the political process.

One could also wonder why authoritarianism has prevailed, rather than exploring reasons for the lack of a transition to democracy. This approach presumes that a transition was underway then was aborted, which was definitely not the case in the countries under consideration, with the exception of Algeria and Sudan for a short period of time.

In fact, leaders of the countries which have embarked upon the path to liberalisation can be classified into two groups: those who claim to be committed to the cause of democracy, and those who believe that democracy of the Western type is a distant goal. In terms of practice, however, there is very little difference between the two: both have been careful to prevent any immediate transition to a fairly elected government.

The ruling elite's perceptions, therefore, make up one possible cause for the persistence of authoritarianism. Other causes include divisions within the political elite, clashes of interests among the upper and middle classes, the effect of developments in other countries, and the lack of international pressures for democratisation.

Authoritarianism in the Arab world is increasingly supported by entrepreneurial groups who have introduced economic reform measures that are resented by most middle-class salaried professionals and wage workers. The process of political liberalisation has been accompanied in all Arab countries by economic liberalisation: the latter provoked contradictory reactions. There is very little evidence that entrepreneurial groups pushed forward political liberalisation, but there is ample evidence that they wholeheartedly endorse economic liberalisation measures which relieve them of heavy taxation, or which offer them incentives to expand their activities and remove restrictions on undertaking economic activities hitherto reserved for the public sector.

In some Arab countries, notably in Egypt, business groups have been associated with the decision-making process related to investment and trade, and have even started to play a role in mobilising support for their countries' foreign policies, using to that effect their links with foreign business communities. For all these reasons, Arab business groups have been notably absent among advocates of political liberalisation in their own countries. On the other hand, the kind of economic reform welcome by businessmen has left many middle-class and working people unhappy as its cost has imposed heavy sacrifices with very few concrete benefits.

In fact, the measures of political liberalisation that have taken place came in the wake of the so-called food riots, in Tunisia in 1978, Algeria in 1988 and Jordan in 1989. Thus, economic liberalisation has probably taken entrepreneurial groups in Arab countries away from the so-called democratic camp, putting them on the side of their authoritarian governments, and depriving those who call for democracy from the kind of backing that entrepreneurial groups provided in other countries, particularly in Brazil, Argentina, or the Philippines and Korea.

The demonstration effect of the political and social instability which followed the near-victory of the FIS in 1991 gave Arab rulers the justification to slow down any move towards further political liberalisation. The shift in Algeria from the policies associated with the single-party regime to unconstrained political pluralism was so sudden and dramatic, with no chance for Algerian political leaders of all political persuasions to work out rules for a smooth transition.

Finally, unlike other regions in the South or former socialist countries, the cause of democracy in Arab countries finds little support outside the Arab world. Those who struggled for democracy in, say, eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia, or Africa found support in Europe and the US in the form of publicity, asylum, moral and material backing, and diplomatic pressure. This has not been the case in the Arab world. It is true that Arab opposition parties do not nurture strong relations with Western political movements, as there are few liberal, Christian democratic or socialist parties in the Arab world. In fact, most of the parties in the Arab world which joined the Socialist International are ruling parties and would do their utmost to prevent the international movement from expressing any form of solidarity with the victims of repressive policies at home.

The Communists are perhaps the only groups with ties to an international movement outside the Arab world. Their influence, however, has waned greatly with the disintegration of the Communist camp.

That exception aside, however, ties with Western or other international parties can be stigmatised by Arab governments and public opinion as evidence of the opposition's servility to foreigners, particularly the former colonial powers.

More significant, perhaps, is the fact that the most popular opposition groups — the most likely to win in the case of genuine democratisation — in many Arab countries are Islamist. In the West, the victory of the Islamists would not be greeted as a victory for democracy, nor as a development that would enhance Western interests in the region. The position of the Islamists on democracy is perceived in the West to be ambivalent if not completely hostile.

Therefore, Western countries view the prospect of free elections in the Arab world with some trepidation. Whereas fair elections in other parts of the world are celebrated as a prelude to cordial relations between the newly democratic countries and the West, entailing increased Western investments and trade, fair elections in the Arab world are viewed as the possible prelude to migration of the intelligentsia to the West and a period of tension in relations with the West and Israel.

It is quite risky to speculate about the prospects of democracy in the Arab world. At any rate, French political scientist Jean Leca is definitely right in stating that, if democracy is translated into several component practices, there is no evidence to suggest that all these practices are rejected by Arab political culture.

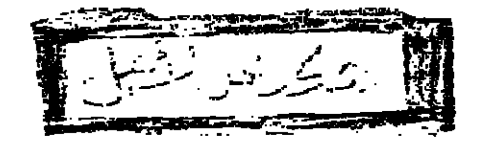
In fact, some of these practices, like a free press, fair elections, freedom of assembly and association, were applied in several Arab countries, were accepted by public opinion, and did not seem to be incompatible with Arab culture. On the other hand, there is no sign that the march towards democracy is about to witness a great leap forward. Arab ruling elites of all kinds seem quite immune from drastic changes in the distribution of power in the near future. It does not seem however, that these ruling elites are going to have an easy time in running the affairs of their countries in the years ahead. Both the international economy and the regional environment will place formidable challenges before them.

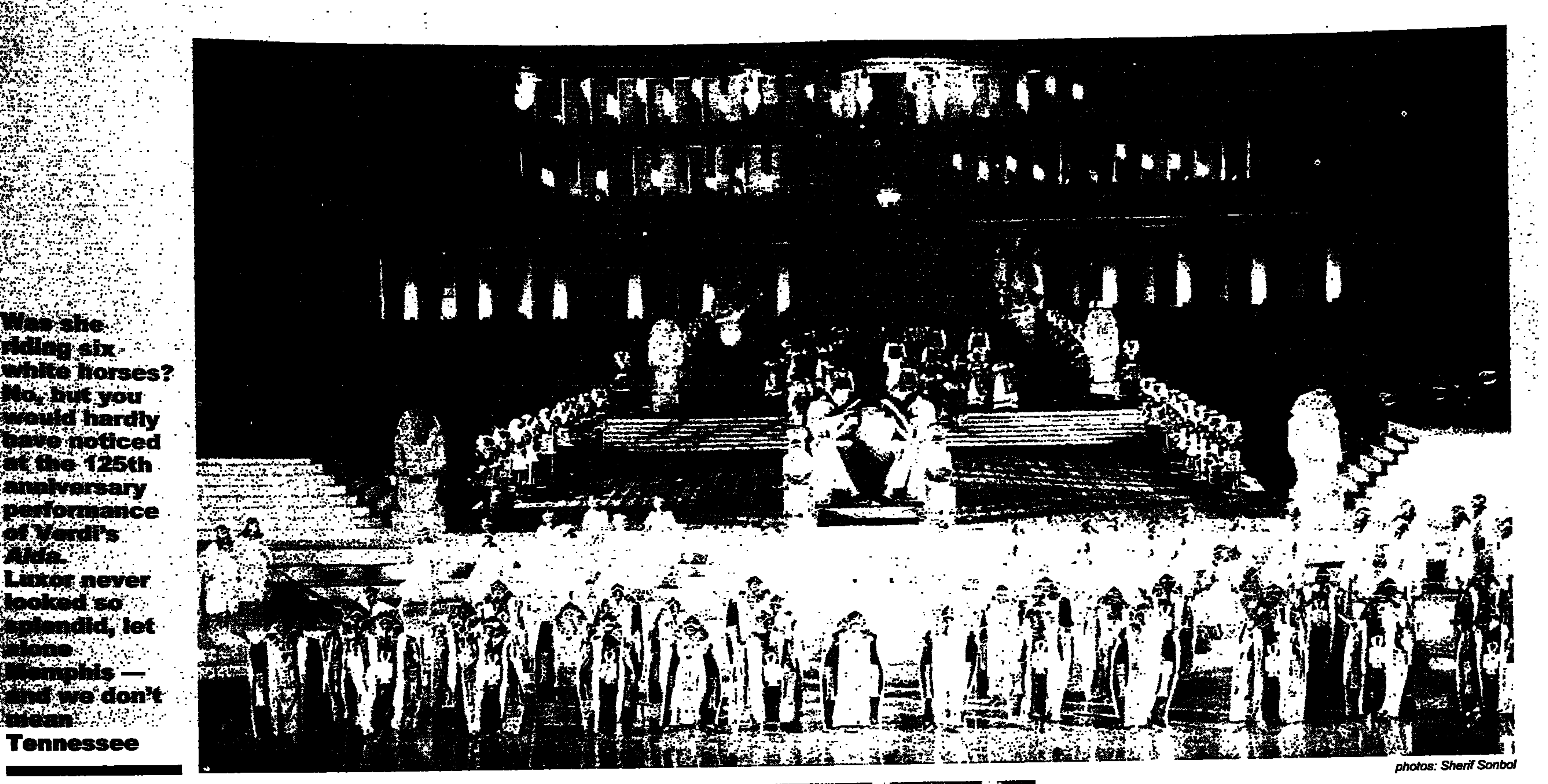
There is no sign that any of the Arab countries is on the verge of the high, sustained economic growth typical of east and south-east Asia. Nor does it seem that success of this type is possible when all countries are embarking upon a development strategy based on export promotion. If all these countries succeed, the end result will be either a fierce trade war or world recession.

Finally, the popular legitimacy of Arab regimes is dependent on their success in facing up to Israeli occupation of Arab lands. With the consolidated international and regional position of Israel, one result of the Iraqi defeat in the Gulf War, the disintegration of the socialist camp and the US's unconditional backing of Israeli policies, the prospect for a settlement acceptable to the Arab public is indeed very limited.

Whether or not the storms provoked by these difficulties will generate new, sustained and successful pressures for the democratisation of authoritarian regimes in the Arab world is a question that few social scientists are capable of answering at present.

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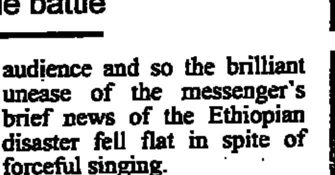
Was she riding six white horses? No, but you would hardly have noticed at the 125th anniversary performance of Verdi's Aida. Luxor never looked so splendid, let alone Memphis — and we don't mean Tennessee

photos: Sherif Sonbol

Coming round the mountain

David Blake joins the gods to watch the battle





Aida; Luxor; 12 October

Stealth. The Prelude to *Aida* steals up from the orchestral pit. It is night music. Most of *Aida* seems to take place in the night. From opening to fade out it is night., except the central triumphal scene which brings the army and its booty — gold, ivory and, most important of all, Aida's father — to Memphis. This is a Verdian opera and Verdi adored baritones, and this one has to be the best, the central desert storm which comes and goes and leaves havoc behind.

Aida as opera is exciting. It is like putting out to sea on a long ocean voyage. Will we sink or swim?

With this *Aida* we swam all the way, accruing memories that will last a long time. It is perhaps the best staging of this work since Zefferilli's La Scala *Aida* with Leontyne Price.

Verdi knew nothing about Ancient Egypt and cared even less. He was always, like Agatha Christie, after a good story, and Mariette, father of Egyptology and creator of the Egyptian Museum, gave him one — *Aida*. We can make up our own Pharaonica because this setting, around Hatshepsut's tomb, carries the same impact as Niagra and the Grand Canyon, with the extra frisson of pharaonica as a kind of cherry on the icing. Up there behind the magic mountain is the valley of the mysterious, positively ravenous and reeking with history, the valley where the professors and adventurers with bucket and spade have unearthed solid gold teenagers, headless queens, and creatures: insect, animal, vegetable and smoke-screened. In this production Anubis and his entourage of cats sit about on hills and pinnacles. Did Anubis bark like a dog? Did he bite? What sounds kept the pharaohs amused?

The famous Luxor mountain does not welcome; it rejects. But thanks to the genius of the lighting artist Antonio Machitella, this mountain is in no way a backdrop. It is a creature reacting to every scene of *Aida*'s dramatic tale of love and lust on the way to the tomb.

Strong words for a strong libretti — Verdi bullied a great story out of Mariette and produced one of the most tidy of all operatic libretti. He knew what he was doing. By 1870, aged 57, Verdi, with 26 operas behind him, thought *Aida* would be his last throw. Of course, it was not; other miracles were to come from him, but *Aida* was, as intended, his big jump into the public arena he had long coveted. The world knows all about the Suez Canal, the old Opera House and the wonderful insanity of Ismail's dreams, so like those of Ludwig of Bavaria. They planned for the future. And Ismail's god-child, *Aida*, goes on and on. She spreads out in all directions, into strange areas, and has become a happening on her own, quite apart from opera: "operaida", Hatshepsut, 1997. It is an event, not exactly opera, film or theatre, but a kind of last earthly gesture before *Aida* takes off into space with the Internet, music's new frontier.

The producer, Attilo Colonnello, and lighting artist Antonio Machitella obviously know this. So they discarded the old fashioned grand opera tradition of Meyerbeer, from which Verdi took the idea of his *Aida*, leaving the 19th century far behind, putting *Aida* far out into the 21st.

As space war spectacle, *Aida* works less well than it would have done had it been staged as straight grand opera. It looked as though it needed more rehearsal. Vast space opera is all very well so long as it makes the narrative clear. This show was occasionally guilty of not doing this, was so taken up with space movement and crowds to fill it that *Aida* and her tormentors got lost in the landscape. It is good track training for the singers. Aida herself, sung by Wilhelmenia Fernandez, is tall, lithe and agile. She needs to be, as she not only sings but is constantly running up and down the carefully raked stairways. Colonnello has made a stupendous space show, which includes the black mountain behind the theatrical performance. Its voracious jaw line dominates everything and a timeless, spaceless atmosphere, which includes even the Valley of Pots and Bodies was created. The mountain changes colour and shape constantly, a metamorphic god-father to the production.

In spite of the opera's size, it moves along, sometimes as fast as an old-fashioned western movie. Act I of this production was slightly cold. The chorus's reaction to Radames's being made field marshal of the Egyptian forces was too distant. They were miles away from the audience and so the brilliant unease of the messenger's brief news of the Ethiopian disaster fell flat in spite of forceful singing.

Fernandez as Aida seemed even firmer and more active than she was three years ago, when she last sang Aida here. She filled the vast spaces with her appearance, a really royal person who made no effort to disguise her status. The voice plunged and soared over the long arias of *Aida*'s music. She was never a victim, but always a genuine person in this Pharaonic mirage around her.

From the scenes between the two women, Aida and Amneris, the temperature rose. Though Amneris, sung by Bruna Baglioni, seemed to be always placed too far from the action of the drama, she nevertheless had beauty of voice and person. The drama soon speeds to the homecoming of the victorious army. Troops, booty and the king Amonasro, Aida's unruly father, sung by Leo Nucci. All audiences wait for him because his dark baritone has the greatest melodies in the opera to blaze forth. Nucci filled the bill, strong, endless power and the correct way to deliver the Verdi grand manner — some snarl, some bite and a lot of rich brown sugar.



The scene spreads out endlessly. A field of battle lies below the viewer. A pleasure to sit way back in the heights of the gods, to see the endless formations moving back and forth in this strange, disturbing production. To have the eagle-eye-view of the plane of Deir El-Bahari spread out before one is an experience that does not come often. This planetary space effect would be missed sitting down close to the stage in the pen reserved for notables. The gods had the bonus. It was transfixing, thrilling.

Is it an opera or for real? Army phalanxers go on over the hill from the desert beyond and strange creatures — people, camels, groups of dogs — move about in the shadows. The effect was opera that had left the theatre far and away. Where? Where science is putting it — beyond words.

The orchestra was problematic. The conductor, Anton Guadagno, is a great one, but in his effort, successful, to keep the vast body moving, he went into speeds that caused wrong entries and, from time to time, the heart stopped. Who could help keep the pace to a level of performance at all? It somehow worked, but at times there was a musical flurry that was disturbing. Guadagno certainly is not one to let a singer linger on a note. Only Aida's blade-like arcs of sound called the orchestral tune.

Act III, the nucleus of *Aida*, opened like a huge underwater sea anemone. Night again, everything flowing, moving, undulating. It had the right mystery for the coming Nile side confrontation. Fernandez, a great Verdian, topped her Nile aria with a Milanov-like high C, spun out like a lunar silk banner. Nucci chased the daughter around in the spaces, finally bringing her to a halt, and they performed the stupendous duet which even Guadagno, relenting, allowed them to sing spaciously.

After the arrest of the unfortunate Radames, sung by Guiseppe Giacomini, Amneris, tormented, arrests everyone, dealing out death. And it is here that super-space opera falls down. Nothing should ever come between Verdi and his theatrical genius for people. Forget the space — it's men, women and power ploys he needs. This production failed to deliver this. Amneris was up in the mountains to deliver her pathetic curses. Amonasro was preparing a get-away over the hills with Aida in train. It was left to the tenor Giacomini to be the last human being at Deir El-Bahari. The dramatic focus should have been on the tenor, but instead it was diffused across the vast arena. Giacomini did his best, but the central person-to-person tragedy was missing. Giacomini has a noble voice. No croon and swoon, but baritonal and paternal. We needed his bodily presence, but it was missing. The lighting, genius though it was, was not enough.

What would the Amneris of the fourth act do with this devouring space? Fortunately she was closer to the audience than she had been in the previous parts of the opera. The priests it was who were in the clouds this time. Reda El-Wakil's appearance, costume and, above all, voice, were in perfect harmony. Impossible to see or hear a finer High Priest Ramfis, king of the Gestappo Inquistion. Colonnello made much of the suffocating grip of the priesthood and of the eventual fate of Amneris at their hands and her curses upon them. Amneris as an actress was splendidly outraged, but brave in her defeat by her tormentors. And the voice, always beautiful, held in the climaxes.

Trouble came in the scene of the heavenly departure in Act IV. It was not celestial *Aida*, but mesmeric *Aida*. The tomb was there and not there. There was supposed to be a pyramid on stage, and there was one. It was already open as the final scene commenced, split open like a fruit to show a glaring black and white drawing of a pair of gods, Anubis and perhaps Horus. The light was too bright for certainty. It was a glare, cutting through the solemn darkness of the tomb. This caricature, like a cartoon from *The New Yorker*, dismayed the vision and destroyed the atmosphere. Aida and Radames in a Tomb for Two, as big as a football arena — who put them in this place? Ramfis or the royal family? There was no time to ask them. The enormities of space and time surrounding them failed to offer any answer. *Aida* ended on a question mark.

Up above, on the heights, Amneris offered her requiem. The orchestra floated the images of heavenly release, but in all this ebb and flow of magical wonders, what happened to Aida and Radames? Where were they? There was an embrace, but *The New Yorker* cartoon held the eye till the end. Rumour has it the couple escaped to Ethiopia, there to begin a new insurrection.

Back-stage a banana republic

At the base of Hatshepsut Temple, real-life drama reached a crescendo as preparations for the massive open-air production of *Aida* neared completion. **Jane Dunford** reports from behind the scenes

For high drama the plot of Verdi's opera *Aida* is hard to beat: a doomed love story, a struggle to the death between powerful protagonists, victors and vanquished locked in a fatal combat while high priests pour poison on merely human passions. But behind the scenes, a drama of its own unfolded.

The Ethiopian slaves rebelled, joined by soldiers and the rabble of ancient times. A contemporary sheikh came to the rescue.

Rehearsals for *Aida* were well under way, when 600 extras — which even the warrior Radames would have had problems controlling — refused to continue working and walked out of the elaborate set.

The extras, all of whom were from the Luxor area, had been recruited to play soldiers, Ethiopian prisoners and Egyptian crowds. But after many days of rehearsals, with none of the promised cash in sight, the army mutinied and went to consult local Sheikh El-Tayeb for guidance.

"It was quite a scene," said Abdalla Saad, manager of the group. "There was a slight delay in payment and all 600 of them went en masse to see the sheikh."

Lucky for Saad, the sheikh convinced them that the show, a centrepiece of Egypt's tourism efforts, must go on. Promises of prompt payment worked miracles.

"They returned to celebrate and grabbed me and carried me onto the stage. They were all standing in one spot and we were terrified the stage was going to collapse," said Saad.

Only from behind the scenes can the full scale of the operation, and the sweat and tears involved in bringing the production to life, be appreciated.

A labyrinth of make-shift changing rooms, make-up rooms, warm-up areas and storage space sprawls under the immense scaffolding structure that bears the stage. The calm splendour of the monumental set belies the hectic world beneath. In the vast, open area behind the stage, hundreds of people in Pharaonic costumes mill about or sit in small groups chatting, framed by the 3,000-year-old Hatshepsut Temple, an eerie sight under the moonlit sky.

With more than 1,000 people taking part in the production, maintaining order is no mean feat. Dozens of harried technical directors scream into walkie-talkies, giving instructions to hundreds of workers. Tailors stitch costumes right to the last minute, final touches are put to props, make-up artists transform performers into Pharaonic characters, scores of wigs are carefully pinned in place, ballet warm-ups are practised.

Part of the Cairo Orchestra is seated behind the scenes to accompany the high priestess singing from backstage. The rest of the orchestra is in front of the stage, necessitating an intricate communication between two conductors using television monitors.

"The atmosphere back here is wonderful," said Karim Kurki, splendid in his priest's costume. "There is so much going on, so many people, nervous and excited, listening to the monitors, waiting for instructions to move."

For the 10 to 12-year-old ballet dancers, dressed in their Ethiopian outfits, the excitement is almost too much. "It's hard to keep them quiet," said make-up artist Salwa Iman, "they just want to run around."

Open-air performances, especially when conducted on such a scale, pose problems that are a million miles from those encountered in enclosed venues, explained Badr El-Zagazigi, engineering director. "People are not contained, it is more difficult to communicate, the dressing areas are obviously not of the same standard as the Opera House and keeping so many people in the right place and getting them to be quiet is hard work. There are so many elements that have to be drawn together, lighting, technical scene changes... problems between performers or mechanical hitches have to be solved instantly, and an immense effort is needed to keep things running smoothly."

The smooth running was finally achieved, but only after a number of minor hitches were ironed out.

One behind-the-scenes drama arose over who should play Aida's part on the opening night. With star soprano Aprile Millo sick and unable to perform, Cairo Opera House officials and director Attilio Colonello had to think quickly. For a moment, harmony was lost.

"They wanted the replacement soprano [Piccolimini] to perform the premier and she had not even had one rehearsal," fumed Colonnello, who felt he had been virtually ignored over the matter. The indecision persisted, continuing until just hours before the opening night performance, when it was finally announced that Wilhelmenia Fernandez, one of the original two divas, would lead the opening performance, not the second one as was previously intended. But not before, according to Colonello's assistant Giovanni Armento, the breaking of a deal of crockery.

Backstage, rivalry for the star role took on elements as desperate and tragic as the battle between Amneris and Aida for Radames' love. Egyptian soprano Iman Mustafa, who sings the part of the high priestess, stepped in for the part of Aida at the final dress rehearsal and came out fighting back the tears. This was the part she had always wanted to play: "I know I can do it, I sang in the dress rehearsal when they asked me to, but still they won't let me perform it live." Her melancholy bore more than a passing resemblance to that of Amneris, the woman who in Radames' eyes, fails to measure up to Aida.

Wings of desire

Nur Elmessiri recognises something in Marco Hillen's photographs

When the camera was invented, painting's answer to the question "what am I any good for?" was largely negative: "I am *not* for things merely visible to the naked eye." Photography seems not to need to answer for itself. It is everywhere. It is unavoidable, as unavoidable in this '90s as it was in the last '90s when painting had to ask questions about itself. Imagine your life without photographs. You might as well try to imagine yourself without a mirror.

But mirrors have not always been with us. They made their appearance on the domestic scene roughly at the same time as the camera — the *camera obscura*, that is, the ancestor of what today we call the camera and to which, together with the mirror, we are beholden for Vermeer's paintings.

What is photography, or the mirror, for? Superstition has it that you know you are in the presence of a vampire because he casts no reflection in a looking glass and that ghosts are not terribly photogenic, cannot easily be pinned down on film.

In some ways there is nothing less *unheimlich*, nothing more domestic or more homely than a photo. What, after all, can be more banally homely than a photo of a family gathering, a holiday snap shot, a toddler's toddling commemorated on negative? The photograph is a pretty bourgeois form of a memento when you come to think of it.

The flip side of "memento", though, it is well to remember every now and then, is "mori". Vermeer remembered this well. Even as they capture things visible and present to the naked eye, his meticulous renditions of 17th century Dutch bourgeois interiors, his "photographic" recording of commonplace domestic actions always remember the absent. His interiors continually invoke the ghost that has not been brought within the ken of the canvas, but which nevertheless lurks around it, is indeed (who knows what went through Vermeer's mind's eye?) the very raison d'être of his paintings. From what we see with the naked eye, Vermeer's paintings seem to whisper, something is always missing. There is, Harry Berger writes of Vermeer's painting, a "conspicuous exclusion" of themes that are saturatingly present but only as *felt absences* — themes that are being held at bay, but conspicuously so" (Lawrence Weschler, "Inventing Peace" *The New Yorker* 20 Nov 1995).

What Berger says of Vermeer is applicable to Marco Hillen's photographs. Though the poster to Hillen's exhibition reads "Together with Ursula Schernig, former director of the Dr Hassan Ragab Gallery for Modern Egyptian Art in Cairo, he visited three Egyptian artists in their villages in March 1996 and made photo reports of them at work and in their environment", "photo reporting" is the last thing that comes to mind when one has seen Hillen's photographs. Like the paintings of Vermeer, Hillen's co-patriot, the photographs seem to say that what is merely present and visible to the eye is a pretext, a medium for conjuring up an absence, or if a presence, then one that is ghostly.



Salah Hassouna, photographed by Marco Hillen

One could take one's cue for trying to understand the photographs which give the exhibition its name — "Three genuine artists of Egypt photographed by Marco Hillen, Amsterdam" — from the other half of the exhibition: cityscapes conspicuously absent from the name under which they have been exhibited. These are of Cairo, by night, by dusk, by dawn. Cairo transfigured into, of all things, a ghost town flecked, as with fireflies in a Northern forest, with dots of light. In one the Nile flowing under the fly-over into Agouza reflects light. What light (artificial? natural? supernatural?) is difficult to tell. There are no people, only buildings — the palm tree Borg, the lotus Ministry of Foreign Affairs, aerialed Maspero — looming menacingly like Easter Island giants, floodlit, dark, crowned with neon by turns. But even they eventually disappear, evaporating into the horizon.

Where is everyone? Under what gaze does this ghost town unfold? The gaze, one senses, belongs to an angel, melancholic like those in Wim Wenders' film *Wings of Desire*, possessed of a black and white bird's eye view of a city s/he knows to teem with life, but tantalisingly removed from it, locked out from the warmth of things tangible, perhaps the price paid for having them so visible. Like the people whom we know to illumine the city with which Youssef Chahine's docu-drama lovingly dealt, the angels in whose gaze Cairo unfolds are present in their absence. They can no longer figure in the realm of things visible, the way they could no longer do so in the landscapes of Jacob Van Ruisdael, Vermeer's contemporary and co-patriot. The clouds in Van Ruisdael support a heavy post-Reformation absence of angels. The buildings in Hillen's photographs teem with the energy of the human bodies that seem to be inaccessible to an angel's gaze.

Opaque, unreflecting eyes of a praying mantis form the centre piece of one of the triptychs that less ambiguously belong to an exhibition which calls itself "Three genuine artists of Egypt photographed by Marco Hillen, Amsterdam". *Faras El-Nabi* (praying mantis, literally, the Prophet's steed) is blind to the two domestic scenes that complete the triptych. One shows Sayed Fayed, one of the three genuine Egyptian artists, carrying a tray of food and looking into the camera lens as straight as far away eyes can look. The other is of Shaykh Ramadan seated with family and friends at a table spilling beyond the picture frame. But who is that strange, shadowy, out-of-focus figure *bringing the food*? And to whom do those hands belong?

Close up on Salah Hassouna's clasped hands at the centre of another triptych. From this exhibition we learn that one hand clasping the other belongs unmistakably to Hassouna just as parted lips belong unmistakably to "a girl" in Vermeer. On one side of the hands is a portrait of Hassouna in a space as claustrophobic as that of many of his paintings, eyes looking at something we cannot see. On the other side, a group of figures (a family snapshot?): on the right, Hassouna, right hand clasping left wrist; on the left, two boys (his sons?); at the centre, shadowy, standing in a doorway, the dark inside of the house behind her and the less dark outside where the other figures have taken their places in front of her, is a woman in black.

Where is inside and where is outside? In other words: who is the seer and who is the seen? Who present and who absent? A school girl opens a door. The outside is behind her; she is looking inside — at us. A landscape opens up behind two figures — Shaykh Ramadan and a "foreign" young lady — sitting in what looked like an interior but, on second glance, proves to be a terrace. The outdoors landscape behind them looks like a poster-size photograph of the outdoors that one would put up indoors.

One photograph of two walls contains a photograph of a man in military uniform, a wristwatch shaped wall clock indicating 12.15, some wiring, a door, and a Vermeeresque curtain pulled to one side of the photo. Elsewhere, two bottles, empty, with "Coca-Cola" written on them catch some light in a dark interior with boy, table, bottles and electric fan. Eyeglasses (Shaykh Ramadan's) reflect a *light* that the eyes of a praying mantis cannot hope to reflect.

These are images that are meant to be read. They seem bewildering at first, these strange juxtapositions of praying mantis and man, all the more so because they have been described as "photo reports". Something missing riddles them. The eyes and objects photographed toss back at the beholder the question "who and what are you?" In this context such binary oppositions as colonising camera gaze vs. colonised photographed subjects are not terribly applicable.

An angel locked out of a space which seems cold precisely because s/he has been locked out; the ghost of an absence lurking around the visible: the beholder. His eye, or lens, is the medium that conjured up such a ghostly presence as ours and set us before others at whom we purport to gaze. We need to take ourselves into account if we want the photographs to add up to something less riddled with ambiguity.

The three almost life-size portraits on show are each of an individual: Shaykh Ramadan, Salah Hassouna, Sayed Fayed. They look straight at us with faraway eyes and smile as if in recognition — ours. Three parallel wrinkles undulate above each pair of smiling eyebrows. We have cast a reflection on the looking glass, have been pinned down on a negative. Memento mori. Hillen's photographs are made of the stuff of such a human remembrance. Remembering, you will not be left cold by Hillen's camera, but will be drawn into interiors kept warm by ghosts who, in any case, know that we delight in their haunting.

(For details of the exhibition, see Listings opposite)

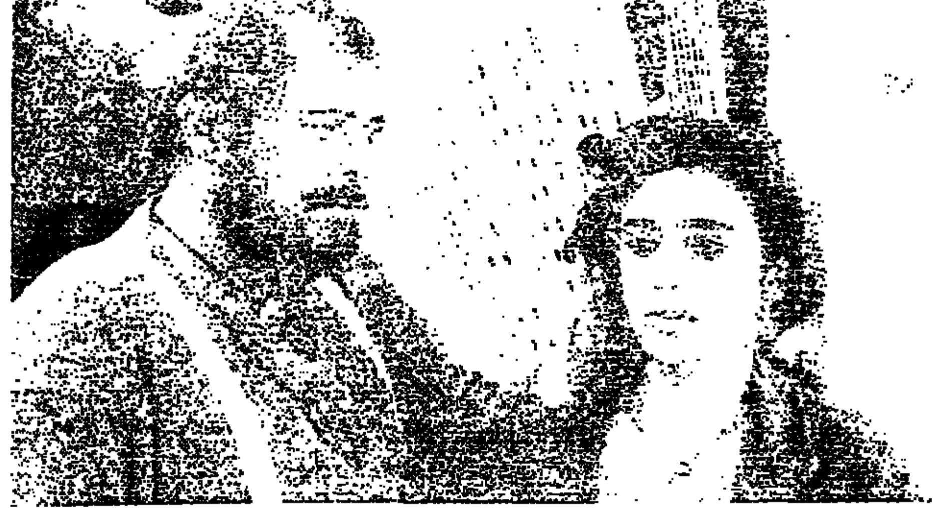
Cinema

Duke of dark corners

Sayed Said's first feature film never quite states, let alone resolves, its central conflicts, writes **Khairiya El-Beshlawi**

El-Qubtan (The Captain) is Sayed Said's first feature film. Earlier work had included two television serials; Said is also a film critic and researcher, as well as head of the Union of Egyptian Critics. Having passed his half century Said was lucky enough to find a producer prepared to risk investing in a first-time film director intent on doing something different.

The result — a new cinematic experience which does, however, feature a well-known star, if only because it would have proved impossible to launch a film here without a star. "The Captain" was produced by Mohamed Ibrahim Ali, a gold dealer who seems to have been overcome by the urge to trade in another lustrous product, the silver screen, and has ended up producing two commercial flops. For the audience, the captain (played by Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz) remains a total mystery, which probably accounts for the film having been withdrawn from cinemas after only two weeks.



Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz and Wafaa Sadeq in *El-Quhtan* (The Captain)

The captain is supposed to be a typically Port Saidi character through whose eyes the audience is meant to witness that port town and its people at a transitional moment in its history: under British occupation and ravaged by cholera. But if the author/director intended the captain to be a symbolic, archetypal figure, the audience could not even begin to unravel the hero's significance, contenting themselves with the song and dance routines, the comic elements and the gags.

The events take place in 1948. *As the new governor* (Ahmed Tewfik) arrives by train in Port Said, the harbour is inundated with boats carrying Palestinians escaping Zionist attacks in Palestine.

From the very beginning, the captain is omnipresent, a witness to all events. He sits opposite the railway station: next we see him at the hotel where a reception is held in honour of the new governor; he pops up angling on the shore, enticing the fish with his songs, while the governor fails to catch a single one, even a tiddler.

The captain and the governor are hardly complementary: the former wields a magic wand that transforms reality into a beautiful fantasy; the latter wields his baton against anyone who dares question a reality dictated by colonialism, dependency and defeat.

The captain, fantastical character that he is, is present everywhere: everyone knows him; he lives all over the place; he is a witness to all events, capable of determining at a glance the worth of everyone he meets. To him, the governor is a laughing stock, the butt of many pranks, who can be thwarted at every corner. All this, of course, is made possible thanks to the many talents that the author of the film has vested in the captain.

This central conflict in the film is difficult to either accept or reject. It is, ultimately, a conflict between a concrete reality that is trite and unconvincing and a fantastical, mythical character who remains elusive and unconvincing. He is, finally, a fantasy, a hostage to the director's own imagination.

The film also offers an image of Port Said in 1948. We see the city through the characters who populate it: the girl-next-door played by Wafaa Sadeq; a young man who becomes a *feda'i* despite his father's being an agent for the British; a gilded youth studying at a French school.

This first film is overburdened with material — not least of which is the tale of the mythic captain who cannot die, who is present everywhere, who speaks many languages and whose origins are a mystery. It is a pity that in presenting all this material, the director pours it all onto the screen in a sort of cinematic free-association with no organic or dramatic links between one sequence and another.

To his credit, however, the director has offered roles to young actors, and the film includes the impressive debut of Wafaa Sadeq.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Youth Salon
Centre of Arts, 1 El-Maahad El-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 7pm-10pm.
Annual showing of new works by young artists.

Wafiq Madbouli Ayad
Exhibition Hall, Al-Ahram Building, El-Galaa St, Boulaq. Tel 5786100. Daily 9am-10pm.

Adly Rizkallah (Watercolours)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St, corner of Montazah, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 16 Oct.

Sobhi Guirguis (Sculpture)
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 6pm-9pm. Until 17 October.

Zakaria El-Qadous (Paintings)
Anfoushi Cultural Palace, by the fish market, Anfoushi, Alexandria. Daily 10am-1.30pm & 5pm-10pm. Until 21 Oct.
Under the title Works for the Love of Egypt.

1952, The Last Protocol: Official Coverage of Egypt's Royal Family at Work and Play
Sony Gallery for Still Photography, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5422. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 23 Oct.
Thirty-six black and white stills, taken by court photographers, surveying the protocol of the Egyptian Royal Court during the reigns of Kings Fouad and Farouk.

Group Exhibition
Salama Gallery, 36/A Ahmed Orabi St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily 2.30pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 23 Oct.
Works by Hussein Bicar, Mustafa Hussein and Makram Henein.

Marco Hillen (Photographs) **and Aida Khalil** (Paintings)
Cairo Atelier, 2 Karim El-Dawla St, Downtown. Tel 574 6730. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 24 Oct.

Sabri Ragheb (Paintings)
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5423. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. Until 27 Oct.

Said Abdel-Rassoul (Paintings)
Khan El-Maghraby Gallery, 18 El-Mansour Mohamed St, Zamalek. Tel 340 3349 Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-9pm. Until 28 Oct.

The Andalusian Ornamental Spirit
Cervantes Institute for Spanish Culture, 20 Boulos Hanna St, Dokki. Tel 360 1746. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10am-2pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 28 Oct.
Sidney Roach, Michel Pastores, Sylva Nasrallah and Evelyne Porret exhibit ceramics, engravings and textiles.

Bookmarkers
French Cultural Centre, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 10am-p2pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 30 Oct.
A collection of 80 bookmarks, from the 1930s to the 1990s.

Mohamed Abla (Paintings)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St. Tel 578 4494. Daily exc Fri, 11am-9pm. Until 30 Oct.
Works under the title Ward El-Nil.

Franz Kafka
Goethe Institute, 5 Abdel-Salam Aref St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877. Until 30 Oct.
Documents and photographs relating to the writer.

Susanne Popelka (Paintings)
Cairo Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef El-Guindi St, Bab El-Louq Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, noon-8pm. Until 30 Oct.
New works portraying masks, eyes and bodies.

Fatouh Said (Sculpture) **& Raffat Zaki** (Drawings)
Donia Gallery, 20 Abdel-Aziz Gawish St, Doctors' Tower, Bab El-Louq. Tel 355 8367. Daily 12noon-10pm. Until 30 Oct.

Maja Soric (Paintings)
Sheba Gallery, 6 Sri Lanka St (Yehia Ibrahim St), Apt 1, Zamalek. Tel 340 9192. Opening 16 Oct, 7pm. Daily exc Sun, 10am-8pm. Until 8 Nov.

Sarwat El-Bahr & Mounir Canaan (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, 3 El-Nessim St, corner of Montazah, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Opening 22 Oct, 7pm. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 9 Nov.

Heinrich Böll: His Life and Works (Documents)
Goethe Institute, language studies department, 14 Hussein Wassef St, Missaha Sq, Dokki. Tel 348 4500. Until 13 Nov.

Omar El-Fayoumi (Paintings)
Espace Gallery, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Opening 22 Oct, 7pm. Daily 10am-2pm & 6pm-9pm; Fri 6pm-9pm. Until 14 Nov.

FILMS

French Films
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya St, Mounira Tel 354 7679.
16 Oct & 19 Oct 7pm: **Danton** (1982). Directed by Andrzej Wajda and starring Gerard Depardieu.
21 Oct & 22 Oct, 7pm: **Le Samouraï** (1967). Directed by Jean-Pierre Melville and starring Alain Delon

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791.

18 Oct, 6.30pm: **Gabriella** (1983), directed by B. Barreto and starring Marcello Mastroianni.
19 Oct, 6.30pm: **La Dolce Vita** (1959) directed by F. Fellini and starring Marcello Mastroianni.
21 Oct, 7pm: **Shooting On the Nile and African Screens**; Documentary films directed, and presented, by Barbara Melega.

The Tragedy of W
Japanese Information and Culture Centre, 106 Qasr El-Aini St, Garden City. 16 Oct, 6pm.
Directed by Shinichiro Sawai (1984).

Commercial cinemas change their programmes every Monday. The information provided is valid through to Sunday after which it is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For information, contact the venue.

The Lost World
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm. Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 1am, 3pm, 6.pm & 9pm.
Steven Spielberg's sequel to Jurassic Park.

Volcano
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Con Air
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm; Thur-Sat midnight show. Normandy, 31 El-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. MGM, Kolleyat El-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 591 6095. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With John Malkovich and Nicholas Cage.

The Saint
Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche El-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 330pm, 6.30pm, 9.30pm & midnight.
With Val Kilmer and Elisabeth Shue.

Ismailia Rayeh Gaey (Ismailia Back and Forth)
Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Haram, El-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm. Odeon II, Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797 Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 934 284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cairo Sheraton, El-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 1am, 3pm, 6.pm & 9.pm.

Gwen Perry at AUC

With Hanan Tork, Khaled El-Nabawi, Mohamed Heneidi and singer Mohamed Fouad.

Afrit El-Nahar (Daytime Demon)
Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Odeon I, Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown, Tel 575 8797. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 574 5656. Daily noon, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm 8pm & 10pm.
With Nour El-Sherif and Elham Shahin.

El-Masir (Le Destin)
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Odeon III, Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown, Tel 575 8797 Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.
Youssef Chahine's latest production, with Nour El-Sherif, Leila Elwi, Mahmoud Hemeida and Safeiya El-Emari.

El-Qobtan (The Captain)
Diana Palace, 17 El-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 924 727. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.
With Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz.

MUSIC

Piano Recital
Gomhouriya Theatre, 12 Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 16 Oct, 9pm.
With Keiko McNamara.

Arabic Music Ensemble
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 341 2926 16 Oct, 8pm.

Arab Song Festival
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 16 Oct, 8pm.

Cairo Opera Children's Choir
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 17 Oct, 2pm.
Conducted by Selim Sahab.

Oboe and Piano Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 18 Oct, 8pm.
With Tarek Mahran.

Master Symphony IV
Main Hall, Opera House, as above. 18 Oct, 8pm.
The Cairo Symphony Orchestra, accompanied by Anastasia Tchebotareva (violin) and conducted by Ahmed El-Saedi, perform Mozart's Parisian Symphony, Berg's Concerto for Violin and Orchestra and Beethoven's Symphony No. 3 in E flat Major op. 55 (Eroica).

Gwen Perry in Concert
Fountain Area, Main Campus, American University in Cairo, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 5423. 18 Oct, 8pm.

Amadeus Chamber Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 19 Oct, 8pm.
With Hassan Sharara (violin), performing Tartini, Beethoven, Karnev and Mozart.

Les Maniacs Meet Fathy Salama's Sharqiyat
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 20 Oct, 8pm & Gomhouriya Theatre, 12 Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 22 Oct, 9pm.
Swiss rock group perform with Sharqiyat.

Egyptian Musical Youth
Small Hall, Opera House, as above. 21 Oct, 8pm.

THEATRE

El-Darafil (The Dolphins)
El-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily, 7pm. Until 16 Oct.
Scripted by Khaled El-Sawi, directed by Hassan Abdou and performed by the Theatre Atelier Company.

Bahlool Fi Istambul
Hilton Ramsis Theatre, Hilton Ramsis annex, El-Galaa St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 10pm; Fri, 8.30pm

Mama America
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, Qasr El-Nil St. Tel 575 0761. Sat & Sun 10pm; Mon 8pm.

'A'elat Wanis (Wanis' Family)
Qasr El-Nil Theatre, as above. Weds & Thurs, 10pm; Fri 8pm.

El-Zaim (The Leader)
El-Haram Theatre, Pyramids Road, Giza. Tel 386 3952. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.

Balle (Fanfare)
Madinet Nasr Theatre, Youssef Abbas St, Nasr City. Tel 402 0804. Daily 10pm; Fri & Mon 8.30pm.

Cromb, Zabadi (Cabbage, Yogurt)
Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10pm; Mon & Fri, 8pm

Taraima II (Melody II)
El-Talia, Ataba Square, Downtown. Tel 937 948. Daily 10pm.
Directed by Entessar Abdel-Fattah.

Leila Foll (Jasmine Night)
Floating Theatre, Adjacent to University Bridge, Manial. Tel 364 9516. Daily exc Tues, 10pm.
Mahmoud El-Alfi directs Ola Rami, Emad Rashad, Mohamed Farid and Ahmed Ibrahim.

Senouhi
National, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 1267. Daily 9.30pm.
Scripted by Ahmed Fouad Selim and directed by Teymour Abashedzi.

El-Qa'eda Wal Estethna' (The Rule and the Exception)
El-Zorqani Hall, National Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 7783. Daily 8.30pm.
With Mohamed Anani and Hamada Abdel-Halim, directed by Mamdouh Aql.

Alabanda
El-Fardos Theatre, El-Beohth Sq. Tel 482 3017. Daily 8.30pm, Thur 9.30pm.

With Lucy, Sherif Mounir, Mona Abdel-Ghani, Mohamed Heneidi and Alaa Waleyeddin; directed by Samir El-Asfouri.

Ayam El-Insan El-Sab'a (The Seven Days of Man)
El-Ghouri Palace, El-Azhar, El-Hossein. Tel 511 0472. Daily 10pm.
Directed by Nasser Abdel-Moneim.

LECTURES

Sureys of Mines and Quarries in the Eastern Desert
Netherlands Institute for Archaeology and Arabic Studies, 1 Mahmoud Azmi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 0076. 16 Oct, 5.30pm.
Lecture by Hans Barnard, University of Delaware Eastern Desert Survey.

The Egyptian Collection at the Civic Archaeological Museum of Bologna
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 El-Sheikh El-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. 16 Oct, 7pm.
Lecture in Italian, with slide presentation, by Professor Sergio Pernigotti, Egyptology Department, University of Bologna.

Presentation of the Special Issue of *Peuples Méditerranéens*
French Cultural Institute, 1 Madraset El-Hoqouq El-Ferensiya Sr, Mounira. Tel 354 4095. 20 Oct, 6.30pm.
Presentation by members of the Department of Translation and Publishing, as well as the authors, on the theme of the issue: the specificity of the imaginary in Egyptian contemporary literature.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries

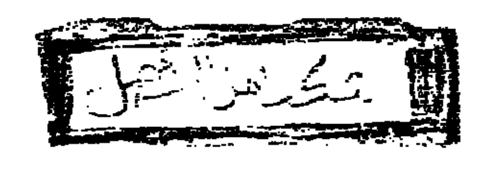
GLASS sculptures by **Iman Nada** and ink drawings by **Khaled El-Deredri** are on show at the **Atelier du Caire**. Though they do not engage with complex formal issues, the sculptures have a certain charm of their own. The drawings make use of a variety of "cosmic" elements — the stars, the moon, the planets — to provide a background for a drama of human emotions unfolding on the pictorial surface.

Heba Ali Ahmed

The **Anfoushi Cultural Palace**, Alexandria, hosts paintings by **Zakaria El-Qadous**. These — portraits, scenes from popular life, seascapes — employ strong, daring colours and are decorative in tendency.

Also in Alexandria, at the **Russian Centre for Sciences and Culture**, are works by 12 artists, this year's participants in the third annual Esmat Dawistashi summer workshop. Particularly noteworthy is the painting by **Heba Ali Ahmed**.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**





Spare a thought for Rame

Nehad Selaiha ponders the implications of this year's Nobel Prize for literature which went to Dario Fo


Dario Fo, surprise winner of this year's Nobel Prize for Literature *(photo: Reuters)*

My first reaction was physical — I went all cross-eyed. "Did you say Dario Fo won the Nobel Prize for Literature?" I yelled at my informant at the other end of the line. Assured it was so, I bellowed again: "Anything about Rame?"

"Who?"

"Rame, Franca Rame — oh, never mind."

Somehow, I never think of Fo (b.1926) in connection with 'literature' — as a 'writer', or even a playwright, but always in connection with 'performance' — as a theatre-maker. Though he has been writing for the stage for nearly 50 years, this activity has always been only one aspect of a composite creative process that has involved acting, directing, theatre-managing, set, costume and even poster designing. Other playwrights who won the same prize in former years (like W B Yeats, Luigi Pirandello and Samuel Beckett) are known to have been actively involved in the production and staging of their own plays, but none of them (not even Pirandello, who formed his own company in 1925, and directed and acted in his plays) has been as completely the all-round *homme de theatre* Dario Fo has consistently been. Unlike them, he has written exclusively for the theatre (never, as far as is known, attempting poetry or fiction), and never treated his theatrical pieces as 'literary works'. For him and his group, they have been working scripts, and plans for action, to be tested, altered and modified in the process of actual performance. Of Fo's method of writing, Peter Bondanella says that he 'wrote hurriedly', often collaborating with others, leaving large areas for improvisation, and relying on "extensive revision after each performance."

In the earliest phase of his career, which began (while he was still studying architecture in Milan) in small cabarets and theatres and in the Italian national radio and television networks, he collaborated with Franco Parenti on a number of satirical revues, of which the most famous are *Il dito nell'occhio* (A Finger in the Eye, 1953) and *I sani da legare* (Certified in Possession of Their Faculties, 1954). His next collaborator was Franca Rame — his wife (for 37 years), life-long friend (despite their divorce in 1988), and loyal comrade in art and arms.

When Fo met her, Franca Rame was an actress who had literally been born in the theatre: her parents were travelling actors and the whole family had been associated with the theatre for generations. Together, they founded a small company in 1952 which included Jacques Lecoq, a former pupil of the great French mime Marcel Marceau, and staged mainly short plays and comic sketches at the Piccolo Teatro di Milano.

The partnership thrived, not only on the domestic level, but artistically as well, and the couple were able by 1957 to set up a larger company, the Compagnia Dario Fo-Franca Rame, with Fo as author, leading actor, producer and designer of sets and costumes. It was obvious from the title of the company that Rame would always come second, play second fiddle. But she did not mind then, and still does not mind now. In an interview published in August 1988, after their divorce (which she announced, of all places, in a television interview), she says that she has always acknowledged the 'absolute superiority' of her husband's talent and blames the fact that her role as his assistant-director was not made public squarely on herself: "It was not that he did not want it known," she says, "I simply never asked. I never liked to show that I cared about the work I do and put on a show of extreme indifference." Still, she would have liked not to have been taken so much for granted, as she confesses: "People can be so insensitive sometimes and do not seem to realise that a marriage is made up of two people, not one. They become like that man in the joke who when asked if he had seen two people come in replied: no, he had only seen a man and his wife."

She had loved Dario Fo more than anything in life and still describes him in that interview as "her one true love, the only man in (her) life." But it was not love alone that made her a satellite in Fo's orbit; there was also her extreme natural shyness (exacerbated by her sensational beauty and magnificent stature) and her upbringing. "It was partly the fault of my mother," she admits; "she had drilled it into me that a wife's place was behind her husband and her only duty was to follow him. If you are just a housewife," she adds with a touch of bitterness, "things are clear and simple; people will tell you 'what lovely pastry you make'. But if you are working with your husband, you must pluck out your identity with your own nails."

It took a long time for the tensions in the relationship to surface: it was not until 1977 that Rame began to do work on her own, and not until 1988 that the couple realised that their marriage, if not their friendship and collaboration, was at an end. (Asked why she had decided to make the divorce public in the course of a television interview, Rame said that she had not decided anything of the sort; it had been an impulsive reaction. Her interviewer, Rafaella Cara, had bombarded her with questions about the secret of her 'happy' marriage until she could take it no longer and blurted out the shocking news).

In 1957, the idea of divorce would have seemed quite preposterous. The couple were passionately in love and happily busy with their new company, producing, in succession, a number of popular, satirical plays — which included *Archangels Don't Play Flipper* (1959), *He Had Two Pistols with Black and White Eyes*, (1960), and *Who Steals a Foot is Lucky in Love* (1961), among others — and performing, in 1962, comic sketches on the television show *Canzonissima* which made them famous all over Italy.

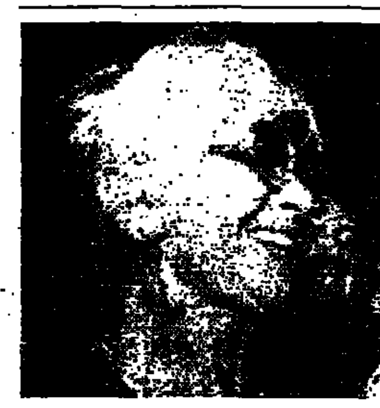
The abolition of censorship in 1962 brought the Italian theatre as a whole in closer touch with Italian society, and the socio-economic upheavals in Italy at the time were quickly reflected in the experimental dramas of Carmelo Bene, the feminist drama of Dacia Maraini and, of course, in the political parables and satires of the Dario Fo-Franca Rame company. Their subsequent comedies, like *Isabella* (1962), *Three Ships and a Knave* (1963), *The Seventh Commandment: Thou Shalt Steal a Little Less* (1964), *It's Always the Devil's Fault* (1965) or This Woman is Expendable (1967) were more politically explicit and clearly focused the element of political activism that had remained an undercurrent in the previous works.

Predictably, the honeymoon with the establishment, if it ever was one, was all too brief. Censorship, in a different guise, reared its head and began to fiercely harass the two artists and restrain their artistic freedom. For 20 years (from 1966 till 1986 — 'the years of exile' as Rame calls them) they were banned from presenting their work in 'official' playhouses or in any of the theatres and various venues run by the Italian Theatre Organisation (ETI). The harassment continued even after the ban was lifted, and as late as December 1991 we find Fo and Rame complaining to the press that they were refused permission to perform their new play *Parliamo Di Donne* (which deals ruthlessly and frankly with the problems of drugs, AIDS, and loneliness) by two theatres in succession. A few years earlier, as Rame said to the newspaper *L'Unita*, they had similarly been refused permission to play in a regular theatre, but had defiantly performed *Don't Pay Attention to Anything Except Your Home, Your Bed, and the Church* in the hall of the municipal library in the presence of thousands of enthusiastic viewers.

In 1966 the couple's response to the ban had been to form another company, Nuova Scena, with links to the Italian Communist Party, and take to the road. They toured Italy with their shows, bringing theatre to small towns and to 'working' people and encouraging them to use theatre as a political forum. The project was highly successful and produced such important works as *The Comic Mystery* (1969), an original series of monologues taken from popular religious works of the middle ages, *The Accidental Death of an Anarchist* (1970), written for the co-operative group, La Comune, and based on a real incident reported in the news: the death of Giuseppe Pinelli, who allegedly committed suicide during an interrogation in 1969, *Knock, Knock — Who's There? The Police!* (1972), which presents the case of Pietro Valpreda and two other anarchists arrested for planting bombs in a Milan Bank in '69, and accuses the Italian prime minister of complicity in the affair, and *Won't Pay! Can't Pay!* in 1975. Other current topics taken from the news and examined in the plays were the rise of the Italian worker's movement, the revolt in Chile, and the Palestinian question; and in most cases the performance included a discussion between actors and audience.

Of this period, Rame remembers, above all, the sheer exhaustion: she acted, assisted Fo, did the paper and some of the administrative work, sold tickets and did the shopping. In between, she took part in civil rights marches, started a campaign to defend political prisoners and detainees, got arrested, beaten and raped, and recorded that horrible experience in a play. But despite the terror, the drudgery, and the rudeness of the 'comrades' who "wouldn't make room for you, would actually elbow you out of the way to pass first", she misses this period 'a little'. "In those days," she tells Rosella Simone in the August '88 interview, "We had values like solidarity and generosity. You don't find them anymore." She has no regrets; she has paid a high price for her options, but has fully enjoyed them. Asked if her political commitment has harmed her career as an actress, she replied: "My politics and my career are one and the same thing. This is the way I am. If my political activities have shut me out of certain areas, I do not care; it can't be helped."

I said earlier that I never think of Dario Fo in connection with 'literature'; it is equally true that I never think of him except in connection with Franca Rame. Indeed, it is difficult in the published plays that carry both their names to sift out the contribution of the one from the other, and it is almost certain that she has actively, and in many ways, contributed to the writing of many plays that do not bear her name. Fo's achievement in the theatre would have been at least different, if not actually smaller, if he had not teamed up with Rame early on in his career, and if she had not tenaciously stood by him through thick and thin. Together, they transformed political struggle into theatre, and theatre into a way of life, and formed a bridge between popular culture and radical intellectuals. It is for this that their collective theatre occupies such a central place in contemporary Italian culture, and it is precisely for this, rather than for any 'literary' texts he has donated to posterity, that Fo was given the Nobel Prize.



"People can be so insensitive sometimes and do not seem to realise that a marriage is made up of two people, not one. They become like that man in the joke who when asked if he had seen two people come in replied: no, he had only seen a man and his wife"

The choice of Fo is definitely a refreshing change, not for any of the obvious political reasons but, rather, because it implies a drastic revision and redefinition of the concept of 'literature', an attempt to challenge and stretch its traditional boundaries to make them embrace poplar culture and oral literature, and a widening of the concept of the 'text' so that it no longer means only a finished product which is 'fixed, complete and unalterable', but also 'that which is to be read in the performance' of the artist whether in life or art.

In both realms, Fo's 'performance' has been inspiring, and the Nobel Prize committee 'read' it correctly; only, they skipped Rame's part in it — a grave omission which may suggest to some a degree of male-bias on the committee's part. As for Franca Rame, I think she will be glad that Fo got it; and if she feels a little sad at this blatant disregard of her contribution, she will console herself, as she always does, with a few hazelnut chocolates. If this fails, she can hop to Paris; there, she is treated as an artist in her own right, and not an extension of Fo, invited to direct plays, and described as one of the best three actresses in the world.

I would not advise her to come to Egypt: here, she is virtually unknown, and so is her ex-husband. Of their joint plays, only one, *Waking Up* (in a sparkling colloquial Arabic translation by Menha El-Batrawi), was presented in Cairo, in the late '80s, in a modest hall at the Manial Youth Centre. The actress in this one-woman show was comedienne Abla Kamel (then, a struggling actress at the beginning of her career), and in the director's seat was Hassan El-Greitly. Between them, they created a perfect little gem of a performance. Around the same time Fo's *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* was briefly seen in Cairo, in a visiting Syrian production directed by Nayla Al-Atrash, during one of the Experimental Theatre festivals. A fringe benefit of Fo's getting the Nobel Prize this year may be that more of his and Rame's plays will be translated and performed in Egypt, and that Abla Kamel (now a famous and very busy TV star) may be persuaded to give us another few performances of *Waking Up*.



Plain Talk

It is always sad to bid farewell to a friend. Richard Hadwick, the assistant representative of the British Council, has greatly contributed to the important process of cultural exchange between Britain and Egypt. During his stay in Egypt, the Council has become a beehive of activities, especially in the field of the arts and the humanities in general. Both he and his indefatigable assistant Basma El-Husseiny have managed to make of the Council a centre reminiscent of what it was in the period of the second world war. Back then the Council and its institutes in Egypt were centres of activity in the liberal arts and, of course, the teaching of English.

My relations with the British Council have had many facets. When I was a student at the British Institute learning English in the 1940s, I was a regular participant in the poetry and drama reading sessions. At that time the Council was producing a magazine called *Citadel*, of which I have possibly the only copies available, and in which I published a number of poems.

After my working years in London I came back in 1956, just one month before the tripartite aggression against Egypt. All the British schools were nationalised and the British Council was put under sequestration. I was one of the two sequestrators, the other being Abdel-Rahim Rashwan, then the chief inspector of English. It was really a wise decision on the part of the Egyptian government to allow us to run the Council just as it had been run under the British administration. The English classes were held as usual, the lectures on English literature and arts continued, English films were shown. Commenting on this, our leading writer Youssef Idris said: "In the morning we used to go out denouncing the British, and in the evening we used to go to the British Council to learn about English literature".

Another phase of my relations with the Council came when I became undersecretary of state for foreign cultural relations. My work was closely connected with the Council and, together, we were able to present to the Egyptian public numerous British dramatic productions, including the Prospect Theatre's production of *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* and the New Vic's *Romeo and Juliet*, performed at the foot of the Sphinx. It was wonderful to watch the balcony scene with Juliet looking down from a high point of the Sphinx.

It was during that time also that the first Book Fair was held, with Dr Mahmoud El-Sheneity as chairman of the Egyptian Book Organisation. The British representation was large, thanks to the assistance of the British Council. That was the start of todays international event.

I have just come across a story in *The Education Supplement* of the *Independent* about the appointment of a new director-general in the place of Sir John Hanson, who is becoming warden of Queen's College, Oxford. I had the pleasure of meeting Sir John and even having him on my television programme *Open Forum*. During his directorship, the Council became a centre for the liberal arts and the humanities.

No one can deny the importance of science in our lives, especially in developing countries. But I have always claimed that while the arts and literature have a character of their own, projecting the national traits of the country in which they are produced, science is common, accumulative, in the sense that it has an international face. It is the arts and humanities which leave an indelible mark on the minds and consciousness of people.

In an interview in *The Independent*, the new director-general, who will assume his new position in the New Year, stresses the importance of the role of the Council in the field of environment, a field which is certainly important to us. I sincerely hope, however, that the educational and cultural role of the Council will not suffer as a result. This will, certainly, upset many people who have been admirers of the Council and its work.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Al-Ahram Weekly

Pages from a diary of oppression

At the fifth conference of the Arab Women's Solidarity Association, Nawal El-Saadawi said she was optimistic that women may eventually fair better. Dina Ezzat attended

"It took this country quarter of a century for a minister of health to recognise female genital mutilation as a serious heath hazard to women; how long can it take the illiterate and oppressed villagers to come to the same conclusion?" asks Nawal El-Saadawi, one of the nation's most prominent feminist writers.

In the lounge of the Greater Cairo Library in Zamalek, during a break in one of the sessions of the fifth Arab Women's Solidarity Association (AWSA) conference, El-Saadawi adds: "In the early 1970s, when I initiated my campaign against female genital mutilation, the then minister of health thought I was making too much noise and he threw me out of my governmental job, as a doctor with the ministry, to punish me. Today there is a minister of health going through legal battles in court to defend his decision to ban the practice."

This is the example El-Saadawi likes to use to sum up the situation of women's rights, across the spectrum from the political to the reproductive: "I am optimistic; there are many challenges, the religious discourse is a serious concern, but what I see today is a step on the right path."

It was this spirit that marked the three-day conference devoted to discussions of issues relating to women's status in the Arab world in general, and Egypt in particular.

Touching on education and mental health, religion, law, the family, political participation and economic changes, participants debated the impact of the political and economic situation on women's status.

During most of the many debates, two phrases were used frequently: "the way political Islam sees women" and "the adverse impact of economic reform measures on women's chances in society". Although some suggested that globalisation and Islamisation are not necessarily deleterious to women, the vast majority of the 200-odd participants seemed to believe otherwise. One point that generated an obvious consensus is that women's rights are not equal to those of men, and that many pretexts, particularly those related to religion, are used to justify and perpetuate this inequality.

"Religion must be a private relation between a human being and the God he or she chooses to believe in," said one woman.

"Religion is part and parcel of our lives, and can never be marginalised under any pretext," replied another.

Both agreed, however, that women are denied proper health care, are generally represented by the media as mentally deficient or predominantly sexual beings, and are denied their basic legal rights by society and their own families.

"It has been an excellent opportunity for very free discussions, with no, or very few, taboos," said El-Saadawi.

In the final communiqué, the participants noted that the conference is being held at a time characterised by rapid and wide-ranging economic, political, social and cultural change, mainly as a result of the process, related to globalisation, leading to the creation of a single world market controlled exclusively by industrialised capitalist countries, if not by "fewer than a thousand men".

El-Saadawi advocated solidarity as a defence mechanism. "Women across the world have to join hands to make sure that such changes will not take a serious toll on them," she said. "Solidarity among women, represented in their organisations, is and must be a priority now; otherwise, we will be swamped."

El-Saadawi was chairing the conference although her organisation is legally a non-entity. Shut down by a decree from the Ministry of Social Affairs in the early 1990s, it had been found guilty of violating the terms regulating the operation of non-governmental organisations. "Our mistake was that we protested against the war led by the US against Iraq; that was considered political activism, and the law prohibits NGOs from engaging in such activism," said El-Saadawi, adding immediately: "I don't understand how we can talk about women's status in the Arab world if we are not talking about politics in the Arab world."

It was due to AWSA's consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) that El-Saadawi managed to obtain a permit from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, thus ensuring that the conference could be held and that speakers from Arab and other states could be invited to participate.

"Our case has been pending for years; but we will not give up," she promised, referring both to the re-establishment of the association and the discussion of politics as an integral part of the question of women's rights.

Currently, the organisation, in collaboration with other Third World and Western NGOs, is trying to launch a campaign within the United Nations to oppose economic embargoes.

"The case of Iraq is a striking example of how lethal such embargoes can be," said Sohair El-Sokkari, the permanent representative of AWSA to the UN. "So far, 750,000 children have died in Iraq due to malnutrition and the lack of medical services that have resulted from the US-imposed embargo. The political pretext is that they are punishing the regime, but we must put an end to this misery."

A paper issued by AWSA is no less categorical: "We feel it is our duty as citizens of this planet to save all children everywhere, irrespective of their nationality, colour, race, ethnicity or religion, not only from the scourge of war but also from all those kinds of measures that are claimed to be non-military in nature but which in actual fact constitute war."

According to El-Saadawi, the coming battle against the policy of economic embargoes is one she is prepared to fight to the end. "I am getting old, but I am not losing faith; I am writing the last part of my memoirs, but I will also embark on a new novel," she said.



Pot Pourri

Consumers of the world, unite

Last week we had a quick lunch at a place best known, maybe, to be entirely fair, for its take-away services, but which, nevertheless, copiously advertises its restaurant. We wanted something small and that is exactly what we got, though the adjective is only apt in describing the portions, not their price.

The food, served in take-away foil containers, arrived none too soon and was unceremoniously dumped on the table, which still carried visible marks of its previous occupants. My salad was made up of a few slices of wilted boiled vegetables swimming in a sea of oil touted as "virgin". This particular virgin, however, was definitely of the born-again variety, having proudly served as a machine lubricant in a previous life.

My daughter, who has learned to fear my reactions in such circumstances, looked at me apprehensively: "Mother, we don't need a fight," she pleaded. I toyed with the diminutive pieces of partially thawed artichoke hearts with a bitter smile. I was missing out on doing what I had every right to do: the right to see the manager, whom I would have informed, in a voice loud enough to attract the undivided attention of the other clients and eventual passersby, that, if I had needed a purgative, I would have gone to the pharmacy.

My daughter takes after my father. He hated what he termed "scandals" in public places. He was quite willing to give up his rights to avoid a confrontation. He just walked away, making a mental note not to return. Not so my mother. She had no peace of mind until she had been served what she had paid for. When we were young, we were proud of our father and tried to emulate his ways. We secretly considered that our mother had an attitude problem, which caused her to behave in public places as if she were better than all those who accepted to be ripped off silently.

With time, however, and the necessity of earning a living, I have discovered that I am becoming exactly like my mother. I fly into frightful rages when the greengrocer tries to slip a rotten apple into my bag, or when I am charged twice by the garbage collector. Like my mother, when my wrath is unleashed it knows no bounds and, like her, I pay no attention to the embarassment of those who happen to be in my company at such times.

Not only do I find myself following in my mother's footsteps, but one particular incident, which is part of our family folklore and which epitomises the feelings of shame which used to overcome us as children, when she behaved in what we imagined to be an unsuitable way, now makes me chuckle with glee every time I remember it.

We belonged to the category of Egyptians who were bent on spending their summers in Europe, come what may. Partaking of the same culture, we tended to show the same uncanny lack of imagination and congregate in the same resorts, patronising the same hotels. Though not always close friends, we were socially acquainted with most of the Egyptian holidaymakers, and behaved accordingly, in the full knowlege that summer gossip would necessarily make for fascinating topics of conversation back home, come winter.

That particular summer, we were spending a couple of months in a mountain resort which boasted a five-star hotel offering the full gamut of sports facilities for the children as well as an exciting night-life for the parents, in a healthy environment, to boot: a huge forest in the middle of nowhere. Egyptian families filled the dining room on the evening when we made our first appearance.

After the soup, my mother pronounced the food inedible. My father promptly pleaded with her not to say anything at this point, and instead to take it up, discreetly, with the hotel manager a little later. My mother sulked and brusquely buttered pieces of bread that she handed around, "the only thing fit for consumption," according to her. At our table, total silence reigned, not unlike the stillness preceding a storm. We were served chicken. My mother sniffed at it, wrinkled her nose in disgust and looked around, finally motioning to a passing waiter. "What exactly is this?" she demanded.

My mother was a striking woman. People, especially men, tended to look at her even when she was silent. On this particular evening, however, her voice rang out freely. The waiter looked as if he would have gladly given up all his earthly belongings just to be elsewhere. The hotel guests were staring, straining to catch every word of the exchange. Grabbing her plate, my mother waved it under the waiter's nose. "This," she said clearly, "is unfit for a dog."

We heard a muffled grunt and the clatter of a fork and knife. Our father, embarrassed but resigned, had absentmindedly started to eat. My mother's damning condemnation of the offending fowl had caught him as he was introducing a small piece into his mouth.

We left this particular hotel the following day, although my mother insisted that the food was bound to improve noticeably. And improve it did, as one of the hotel guests confirmed later in Cairo, adding that my mother had done the thing they had all been dreaming of, but never dared to do.

Fayza Hassan

Windmills of the mind

SOLAR energy, hydro-electricity, nuclear power stations... A fertile imagination can transform even these relatively uninspiring sources of energy into works of art, as the participants in the 1997 Egyptian Children's Drawing Competition have proved decisively. Under the auspices of Minister of Petroleum Hamdi El-Banbi, Ibrahim Abdel-Gelil, executive director of the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Association (EEAA) and former head of the Energy Planning Institute, opened an exhibition at which the winning and outstanding entries were displayed at the Small Hall of the Cairo Opera House. At the inauguration ceremony last Tuesday, writes **Mahmoud Bakr**, Abdel-Gelil distributed prizes to the winners. This year, the theme of the competition was different sources of energy, their possible uses, and their impact on the environment.

Abdel-Gelil said that 350 children from schools across the country participated in the competition, organised by the Energy Planning Institute. The diversity evident in the different entries, he noted, was proof of the children's vivid imagination and creative capabilities. The jury, made up of professors of fine arts, remarked on the talent displayed in the drawings, and advised the children's families to nurture their budding artists. Abdel-Gelil added that the EEAA will use the drawings in its information pamphlets and other publications.

First prize in the 7-10 category went to Doaa Alaaeddin Mohamed, who is seven, while Mustafa Mohamed Mustafa received second prize, and Shibl Essameddin came third.

In the 11-15 age group, Ayat Essam El-Essawi was the proud winner of the first prize, while Reem Rashwan and Randa Mahmoud received the second and third prizes respectively. Twenty children from both age groups received awards of encouragement.

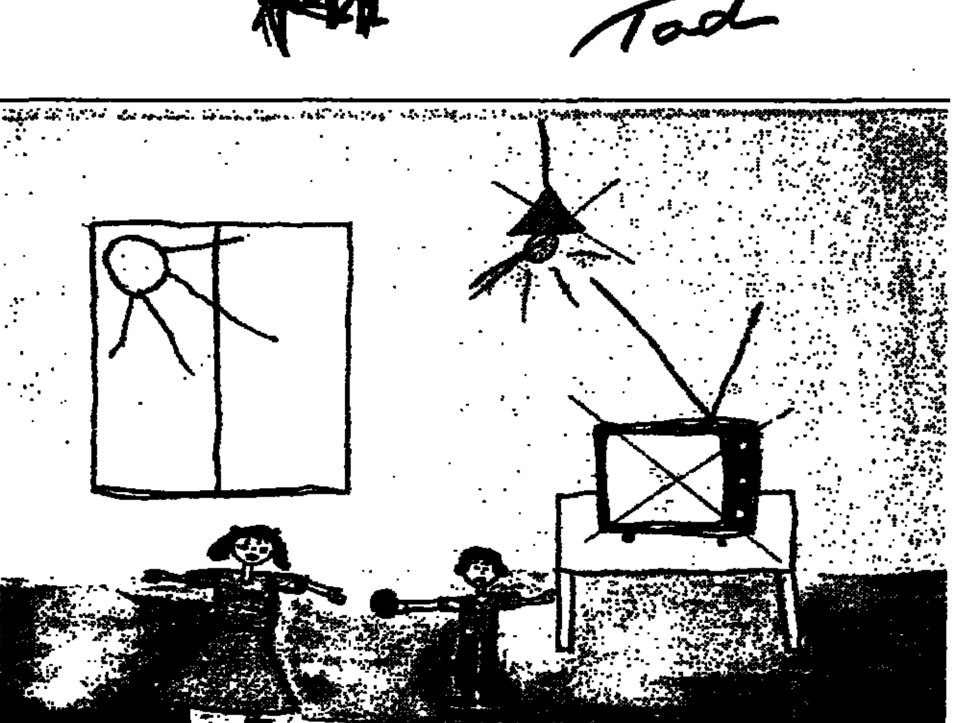


photo: Adel Ahmed

Sufra Dayma

Minced meat loaf

Ingredients:
1/2 kg minced meat
1 onion (grated)
5 tbsp. bread crumbs
2 whole eggs
1 tbsp. white flour
3/4 cup whole milk
Salt+pepper+allspice
+grated nutmeg
Butter

Method:
Coat with butter a Teflon cake mould. Mix all ingredients well until they completely blend. Put them in the mould. Bake for half an hour in a moderate/high preheated oven, covered with aluminium foil. Allow to cool then cut in slices and serve.

Optional:
You can stuff the blend before baking with three or four hard boiled eggs by patting in half the quantity of the blend, then adding the eggs, and patting the other half of the blend on top and folding it well. This dish is called 'Scotch Egg'.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Irish stew

Andrew Steele loses his shirt

Marco Polo, apart from having a mint named after him, was the first to bring spaghetti to Europe from China. No spaghetti, however, is to be found on the menu of the flagship restaurant that bears his name at Le Méridien in Heliopolis. I'm very fond of making reservations at an up-market venue; it gives one certain delusions of grandeur that give cause to all sorts of rash behaviour when confronted with menus and wine lists; and the menu and wine list at this most illustrious of venues has prices that seem very rash indeed when presented in Egyptian currency. We thought, however, that if the food is exquisite, and the service impeccable, it is always wise to have a top-notch sort of venue in one's repertoire of places to take a dinner guest. We were not disappointed by the service.

The menu at the Marco Polo is a Frenchy sort of affair, with nods to Italy thrown in for good measure. Verily, it promises the most marvellous array of gastronomic concoctions, dishes that conjure up the words "haute" and, indeed, "cuisine". In reality, I'm afraid, the chef does not quite pull it off, and at these prices, that furrows a brow. We began with Filet de Rouget Meridional Chapelore de Taboule à la Menthe, Papillon aux Salpicons de Crevette Infusion Crème au Safran, and Ravioli d'Artichaut, Fromage de Chèvre doux à la Coriande. A mouthful to order, perhaps, but hardly more than a couple of mouthfuls to eat. My red mullet came cold and well filleted, with, not *tabboula*, as I'd thought, but with a dollop of jolly good ratatouille and a rim of couscous. It was garnished with a startling pastry lattice-work, rather resembling a rack. If readers of this column have any idea as to the culinary term for this intriguing device, please let me know. The ravioli was perhaps the finest of the appetisers, and a valid attempt at creating a pink dish, the ravioli itself bearing the rose-like hue. It came garnished with artichoke shavings and a roundel of goat cheese. No sauce, save the butter it had been tossed in, it was described as correctly restrained and utterly delicious. Of the bow pasta with shrimps and saffron cream, the shrimps were declared magnificent, the pasta rather chewy and the sauce rather watery and lacking in direction.

It was unfortunate, then, that the person who felt let down by the bow pasta, also experienced the vivid horrors of an Irish Stew with a shrimp and half a crab shell in it, masquerading under the name Fraicheur Exquise de Fruit de Mer en Bouillabaisse. My Filet de Daurade Braisé Marco Polo was rather better, although the heavy cream and mushroom sauce was more than a little over the top. The best of the main courses was the Escalope Croustillant de Saumon Frais Mousseline de Champagne, which, if a little over-poached, came with a wonderful potato crust, and a fine foamy mousseline with hints of wine and wonder. One of us managed a custard-like Crème Brulée for pudding, all of us suffered insipid espressos.

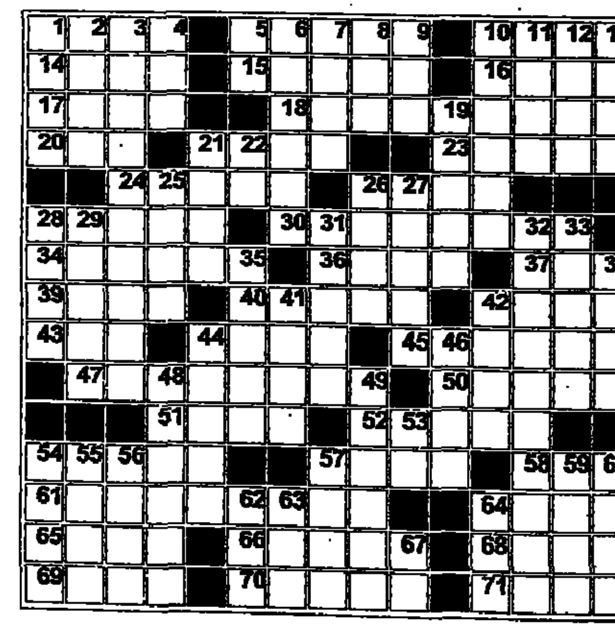
Not quite what it should have been, then, and I blame it on the chef. The bill for dinner for three with one bottle of 1994 Bordeaux Blanc was LE 570, and at those sorts of prices there's simply no excuse. Bah, humbug.

Marco Polo at Le Méridien Heliopolis, 51 Orouba Street, Heliopolis
Tel: 2912561

Al-Ahram Weekly

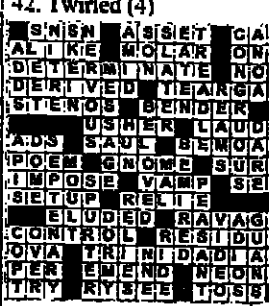


By Samia Abdennour



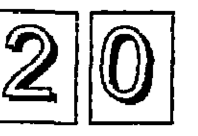
Across
1. Principles; body of law (4)
5. Carry the torch for; glorify (5)
10. Border (4)
14. Presage (4)
15. Var. of "kebab" (5)
16. Pigeonhole (4)
17. Racing measure (4)
18. Wretched (9)
20. Dined (3)
21. Prong (4)
23. Broadcast (5)
24. Want with all one's heart (5)
26. Gull-like sea bird (4)
28. Indian lute (5)
30. Amusement (8)
34. The cashew tree (6)
36. A European wild ox (4)
37. Dawn goddess (3)
39. Arabic name for "Thebes" (4)
40. Domesticated (5)
42. Twirled (4)
43. Poorly (3)
44. yearn for (4)
45. Chemical solution obtained by washing with a solvent (6)
47. Intended to terminate after one year (8)
50. Throe, jumbled (5)
51. Yuletide (4)
52. Anatomical organ (5)
54. Fruit filled pies (5)
57. Speck of dust (4)
58. Squid's defense (3)
61. Figure to frighten birds (9)
64. Shower (4)
65. Singer Paul... (4)
66. Seraglio (5)
68. Small spirit lamp (4)
69. Sway (4)
70. passive; motionless (5)
71. Change direction (4)

Down
1. Prolonged unconsciousness (4)
2. Neglect (4)
3. Enchanting; delightful (10)
4. Weather directions (3)
5. One type of electrical current, abb. (2)
6. Came to mind; grew light (6)
7. Musical instrument (4)
8. Deer (3)
9. Reflux; low water (3)
10. Motor (6)
11. Portal (4)
12. Departed (4)
13. Supplemented (4)
19. British noblemen (5)
21. Colocassia (4)
22. Describing some injections, abb. (2)
25. Indian nobleman (4)
26. Rent (4)
27. dodge (5)
28. Hindu practice where widow immolates herself on husband;s funeral pyre (4)
29. In a very cold manner (5)
31. First stomach of a ruminant (5)
32. Return to native country (10)
33. Salad days (5)
35. Serviceable (5)
38. A Dutch dagger (4)
41. Indigo dye (4)
42. Certain (4)
44. Commonplace writing (5)
46. Cherish (4)
48. Pertaining to cavity in bone (6)
49. Look daggers (6)
53. Personal pronoun (2)
54. Former Russian emperor (4)
55. Skin disease (4)
56. Garden tool; sloping angle (4)
57. In addition (4)
59. Number of muses (4)
60. Knot in tree trunk (4)
62. Greek letter (3)
63. Raced (3)
64. Accelerate (3)
67. Mountain, abb. (2)



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Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life



Reporters attending the sessions of the People's Assembly and the Shura Council may not be aware that their right to sit at the press boxes of these bodies was only acquired in 1909, four decades after parliamentary life started in Egypt. *Al-Ahram*, notes Dr Yunan Labib Rizq, not only covered the battle for that right, but was part of it

Egypt's first representational institution, the Chamber of Deputies, was created in 1866 under the Khedive *Ismail*. The press was not allowed into the parliament. Practically, press coverage was difficult because the parliament met only intermittently, as it was summoned at the will of the khedive. In any event, the national press was still at a fledgling phase. *Al-Ahram* itself was founded in 1876 as a weekly newspaper. A major stipulation of the licences granted to newspaper owners was to steer clear of political issues.

The issue of opening parliamentary assemblies to the press first arose with the establishment of the new parliamentary institutions created under the Organic Law of 1883, promulgated shortly after the British occupation of Egypt. The law was explicit: no one would be permitted to attend the sessions of the Legislative Council (*Majlis Shura Al-Qawanin*) and the Legislative Assembly (*Al-Gam'iyya Al-'Umumiyya*) "apart from the ministers, their guests, or delegates designated by them." The point was clear. The representatives of public opinion would not *be permitted to observe what* transpired in these representative chambers. Certainly the British, who created these institutions based on the recommendations of Lord Duffrin, their ambassador in Istanbul, had much to gain. The press would not be able to expose how they had transformed an institution that had acquired some significant legislative powers under Ismail and his successor Tawfiq to a timid lapdog with little more than an advisory capacity. The government, as represented by the khedive and his cabinet, could also breathe easier. They had few resources with which to combat British control over the decision-making process, but at least they could turn the new parliamentary bodies to their advantage by appointing supporters who would approve the laws they wanted without undue hubbub. It would be neither in the government's, nor for that matter in the deputies', interests were the press to reveal the extent to which parliament had been transformed into a body of "yes-men."

The parliamentary situation remained virtually unchanged throughout the first 20 years of British rule. The turn of the century, however, brought domestic and international developments that gave momentum to the Egyptian nationalist movement and in turn effected the character of the country's parliamentary institutions and their openness to public scrutiny. The first major development was the emergence in 1907 of political parties. One feature *in common in the platforms of the in*cipient parties was the demand for a national constitution. Indeed, one party called itself the Constitutional Reform Party. Addressing its first general assembly, its founder, Sheikh Ali Yousef, said, "Political parties are the most powerful instrument of transforming absolute rule into a national constitutional government. There is not a single representational government in the world that has not been preceded by the formation of political parties." The Nationalist Party, a prominent advocate of constitutional reform, demanded "a complete constitutional government in which sovereignty is derived from the people and the governing authority is responsible to a fully empowered representative council". The Umma (Nation) Party was not as stringent. It called for "expanding the powers of the Directorate Councils, the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly until the country is able to gradually develop the representative council that best suits its circumstances."

The reopening of the Turkish parliament in July 1908 undercut the long-standing British argument that "parliamentary life was unsuited to oriental nations." As such pretexts fell by the wayside, so too would many objections to broader public participation in government and greater public scrutiny of its governing bodies.

Another important development at the turn of the century was the rapid spread of the press. In addition to the four major newspapers — *Al-Ahram*, *Al-Mu'ayyid*, *Al-Muqattam* and *Al-Liwa* — numerous smaller newspapers and magazines came into being. Many of these publications had their own English and French language editions. According to one source, the Nationalist Party had no fewer than eight newspapers spreading its views. *Al-Liwa* was the most prominent of these, having been established by the party founder, Mustafa Kamel, in 1900. Another paper, founded by Mohammed Farid Wagdi, was called *Al-Dustur* (The Constitution). Little wonder, given the general climate, the press called *for public scrutiny of the parliamentary* institutions.

The issue came to a head in the Legislative Assembly meeting of 8 February 1909. *Al-Ahram* reports that among the 90 issues on the assembly's agenda "God willed it that Khashaba Bek's proposal to render the meetings of the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council open to the public was the first to be discussed." Although the proposal met some dissent, the majority voted in favour, at which point "the prime minister declared the government willingly approved the proposal, winning the applause of the entire representative assembly. The applause was heard by members of the press who were standing outside and within a few moments some members of parliament came out to give them the good news."



Illustration by: Makram Henein

By the end of the month, the khedive issued a royal edict amending articles 29 and 38 of the 1883 Organic Law to permit public attendance of the meetings of both the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly. Still, some members attempted to use the parliamentary by-laws in order to stall the edict's implementation of the edict. As *Al-Ahram* remarked, "It seems that some of our noble delegates still hope from the bottom of their hearts to put off the day when the assembly opens its doors to the press. Were it otherwise, they would not hesitate to form a committee to draw up the appropriate by-laws." In a later issue, *Al-Ahram* commented, "The European newspapers mock us and our most distinguished delegates who oppose opening parliamentary sessions to the public. We say that the distinguished delegates who claim to demand a representative council for Egypt are trying with all their might to keep the parliament doors closed by using the parliamentary by-laws as a pretext. Some even go so far as to claim that we, the Egyptian people, have nowhere else to turn but to our distinguished delegates who plead the welfare of the country but who, once the doors to parliament are closed, laugh at the nation behind its back."

On 9 March 1909, representatives of *eleven* newspapers, including *Al-Ahram*, *Al-Mu'ayyid*, *Al-Muqattam* and *Al-Liwa*, submitted a petition to the speaker of the Legislative Council, Prince Hussein Kamel, which read, "As the press is eager to perform that task incumbent upon it in its capacity as an intermediary between the people and the government, we appeal to your highness, in the name of the Egyptian press, to open the two houses of parliament to journalists by the first session in April, in accordance with the right *entrusted to us in the Royal edict.*"

Two months later, the long-awaited by-law was published. On 24 May 1909, Egyptian parliamentary reporting was born. Every daily newspaper was entitled to a permanent ticket "to accommodate one representative of that newspaper at the discretion of the owner of the newspaper." The fourth article brought the press box into being: "Representatives of the press are to sit at the seats designated for them, maintain utter silence and in no way express approval or disapproval of the proceedings." One can easily picture the excitement that charged the air on 1 June 1909, when the first parliamentary session open to the public was held. *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent wrote, "We arrived at the Legislative Council in the morning. When the doors opened we made our way up to the seats set aside for the members of the press. There were 39 seats arranged in three rows. Every newspaper was assigned a seat number. *Al-Ahram* has been allocated the first seat on the first row."

The correspondent then turned his attention to the floor of the assembly hall: "Every seat has a plaque bearing the name of its occupant. To the left we could see the ministers sitting as though they were school masters. Some would look at us stealthily from time to time. There was Abaza Pasha, brushing his *forehead* with his hand as if to summon his thoughts, for he had much to say on every subject. As he spoke, he would look up at the press as though to say, 'Have I not struggled on your behalf?' As for the true friend of the press, Hassan Bek Bakri, he resembled a bomb fused by passion that only needed a slight touch to be set off."

Naturally the correspondent would record the opening address of the speaker. With reference to that particular occasion, Prince Hussein said, "As you are all aware, opening the parliament to the press will bring great benefit. The nation will be informed of the discussions and actions that take place within this hall virtually as they occur... We welcome the members of the press, who, in their dedication to *their profession, will be in a better po*sition to elevate the morals, intellect and discourse of the nation and to alert the governing body to any shortcomings."

Once the assembly got down to business, the *Al-Ahram* correspondent made numerous observations on the comportment of the members, some of which still relevant today: "most members do not speak loud enough for the spectators to hear what they are saying and some even remain seated as they speak as though conversing with a neighbour, thereby weakening the impact of the debate." He also observed, "There is a tendency for three or four members to speak at the same time. Everyone should await his turn or signal the chairman for permission to speak. Otherwise, it is bedlam and the value of debate is lost in the general din." The writer also objected to the manner of vote taking. "Firstly, you find that when some of the members say 'aye' others join in even if they have not glanced at the text of the resolution they are voting on. Secondly, you find that once a vote has been taken, some members continue to argue their points even though the matter was settled."

To solve the voting problem, the correspondent recommends, members of the parliament should study the bills carefully "so that they can make an informed vote." Voting, he advises, should be taken by roll-call, so as to make the voting record of each member clear and public. *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent also acted as a self-appointed monitor of absenteeism: "Today, we saw nine chairs vacant and these belong to..." One imagines that attendance figures must have risen as a result.

Early on, the presence of the press inside the chambers of parliament demonstrated its efficacy, for the parliament responded to many of its observations. *Al-Ahram*, for example, complained that most of the time during any particular session was take up by the reading of the minutes of previous sessions. Then, on 10 June 1909 the newspaper reports, "We have learned that the Council has decided not to waste time with the reading of minutes, instead, has resolved to publish the minutes of each meeting and to distribute these to the members. Then, should any member have an objection to the contents, he can move to correct it. We heartily welcome this decision." A second recommendation voiced by *Al-Ahram*'s parliamentary reporter was to reread all bills of law after they had been amended or redrafted. When the Legislative Council acted on this, he rejoiced: "Now the Council has *followed in the steps of the repre*sentative and legislative institutions of nations with constitutional governments!" One could only hope that successors to the seats in the parliamentary press box continue to follow that reporter's lofty example.

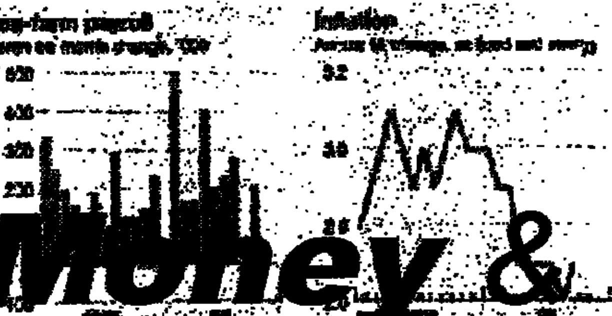
The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

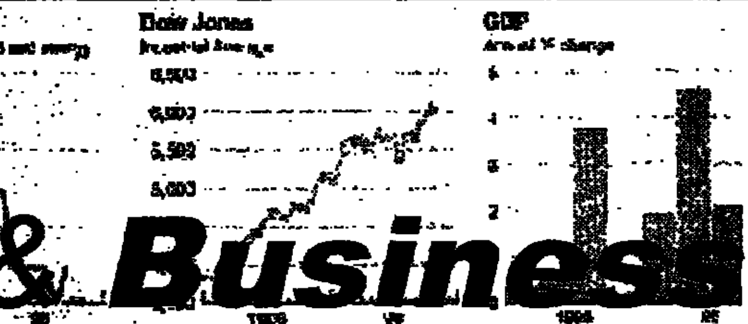


Mohandes Insurance in *Lloyd's*

THE LARGEST publication specialised in the insurance industry *Lloyd's*, published in its Thursday, 9 October edition, a newsbrief on Mohandes Insurance Company, reporting a rise in net profits from the past 12 months to June of LE8.7 million.

This report confirms what Dr Botrous Ghali, minister of economy, said about the outstanding role which private sector insurance companies play in leading the way towards the 21st century, explained Dr Samir Metwalli, president of Mohandes Insurance Company.





Camel race in Sharm El-Sheikh

GOVERNOR of South Sinai Mustafa Afifi announced that the forthcoming weeks would witness the implementation of an extensive plan to develop tourism in South Sinai that would include the efforts of all sectors in the governorate.

Afifi explained that within this framework, preparations are being made to hold a camel race in Sharm El-Sheikh from 24-26 November. Participants from Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Palestine, Jordan, Libya and Yemen are expected to participate in the event, which will attract numerous tourists.

Al-Ahram Egyptian Products Exhibition in Bahrain









Dr Ahmed Guweili — Ali Salih Al-Salih — Ahmed Khalid Hamdi — Mohamed Al-Sayed Salib

EGYPTIAN-Bahraini relations have taken great strides in recent years, mainly due to the positive results of the meetings of the Egyptian-Bahraini Higher Cooperative Council, headed by the prime ministers of both countries, who ratified a commercial and economic agreement calling for the establishment of a mutual free trade zone. Within the context of enhancing bilateral commercial exchange, the first Egyptian products exhibition in Manama, organised by Al-Ahram Organisation and under the auspices of the Egyptian and Bahraini prime ministers, is currently under way.

An agreement establishing the Egyptian-Bahraini Higher Cooperative Council was ratified in December 1992, while an agreement on 21 November 1993 called for economic and commercial cooperation through the establishment of a joint free zone.

Signing the agreement aimed at liberalising commercial exchange between the two countries was Dr Ahmed Guweili, minister of trade and development, and Bahraini Financial Minister Ibrahim Abdel-Karim. The agreement lifted export restrictions by removing tariffs and other taxes that had previously hampered the flow of trade. The two countries are also bound by a second agreement to eliminate double taxation.

Guweili said that a study is currently being undertaken by the Bahraini side to explore the possibilities of establishing a joint venture for a bilateral marketing of products, which would also increase in scope to include the markets of neighbouring countries. Work is also being done to facilitate interaction between Egyptian and Bahraini businessmen, with the aim of establishing joint commercial and industrial projects, in accordance with a tri-party agreement between the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Bahrain, the General Federation of Egyptian Chambers of Commerce and the Egyptian Businessman's Association, ratified on 10 December 1993.

The minister also indicated that a variety of specialised joint exhibitions are being planned to take place in other international marketplaces.

Ahmed Khalid Hamdi, head of the Commercial Representation Office, said that commercial exchange between Egypt and Bahrain at the end of 1996 reached nearly LE15 million, with Egyptian exports to Bahrain taking up LE9 million, and LE6 million in Bahraini imports to Egypt. Among the most important Egyptian exports to Bahrain are pharmaceuticals, onions and guava, textiles, copper products, furniture and books.

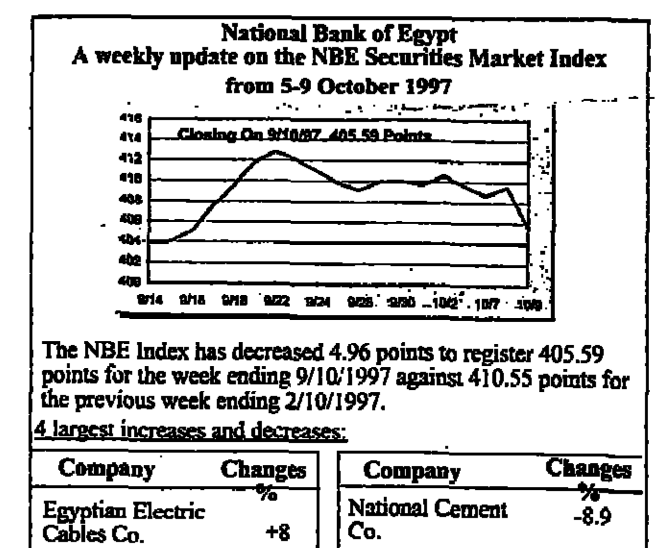
As for Egyptian imports from Bahrain, these includes aluminium products, machinery and equipment and cables.

Mr Mohamed Al-Sayed Salih, head of the Bahraini Exhibition Organisation, explained that a symposium entitled "Arab Commercial Relations" would be conducted on the sidelines of the exhibition, to be attended by leading industrial and investment figures from Egypt, in addition to members of the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and ministers from Bahrain. The symposium is being sponsored by the Egyptian Embassy in Bahrain and *Al-Ahram*.

Medhat Monsour, general manager of Pyramids Advertising Agency, explained that the Al-Ahram Egyptian Products and Real Estate Exhibition in Bahrain offers high-quality products from private sector companies, and investment opportunities from real estate companies and banks.

Important sectors represented at the exhibition include ready-made clothes, furniture, household tools, hotel equipment, chemicals and pharmaceuticals, cosmetics and agricultural products.

National Bank of Egypt
A weekly update on the NBE Securities Market Index from 5-9 October 1997



The NBE Index has decreased 4.96 points to register 405.59 points for the week ending 9/10/1997 against 410.55 points for the previous week ending 2/10/1997.

4 largest increases and decreases:

Company	Changes %
Egyptian Electric Cables Co.	+8
Alexandria Pharmaceutical Co.	+5.1
Egyptian International Pharmaceutical Co.	+2.5
Torah Portland Cement Co.	+2.3

Company	Changes %
National Cement Co.	-8.9
United Housing and Development Co.	-5.6
El-Ama Company for Silos and Storage	-4.0
National Bank for Development	-2.9

Sri Lanka Expo '97 8-11 November 1997

THE SRI Lanka Export Development Board, the Sri Lanka government's institution responsible for organising international exhibitions, is planing to hold Sri Lanka's biggest international export fair — Sri Lanka Expo '97 at the Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall (BMICH) in Colombo, from 8-11 November 1997.

Sri Lanka Expo '97 is a general fair featuring the entire range of products manufactured and exported by Sri Lanka. It is expected that around 400 exhibitors will participate in this event.

Sri Lanka has become one of Asia's emerging growth centre, with one of the most vibrant economies in the South Asian region. Liberal, market-oriented policies have accelerated the development process and opened new vistas for investments an business opportunities in the country. Sri Lanka Expo '97 will be an ideal opportunity for your company to expand commercial relations not only with Sri Lanka but also with the rest of the Asian countries.

75 years after Howard Carter uncovered the tomb of Tutankhamun, the discoverer's home becomes a museum, while debate rages about the child pharaoh's untimely demise

Who killed Tutankhamun?

More than 3,000 years after the death of the young Pharaoh Tutankhamun, questions are still being asked about how he died. Was it a natural death or was he murdered? **Nevine El-Aref** reviews the evidence

The possibility that Tutankhamun did not die of natural causes was first raised 28 years ago when an X-ray analysis of his mummy was made by the anatomy department of the University of Liverpool. It revealed that the king may have died from a blow to the back of his head.

The suggestion caused a controversy among Egyptologists and scientists. If he were murdered, whodunnit? Was it Aye, Tutankhamun's vizier who ascended to the throne after his death and married his wife? Or was it Horemhab, the army officer who became king after Aye's short four-year rule? Some scholars suggested that Aye and Horemhab might have shared the guilt, working in cahoots to kill the boy.

Early this year, a new X-ray analysis cast more light on the subject, this time suggesting that Tutankhamun may have been murdered in his sleep. The examination was conducted by a trauma specialist at Long Island University, USA. "The blow was to a protected area at the back of the head which you don't injure in an accident, someone had to sneak up from behind," said the specialist.

X-rays also show a thickening of a bone in the cranium which could occur only after a build-up of blood. This would indicate that the king might have been left bleeding for a long time before he actually died.

In short, scientists suggest that the king was most probably hit on the back of his head while asleep and that he lingered, maybe for as long as two months, before he died.

According to Mohamed Saleh, director-general of the Egyptian Museum, the original analysis of Tutankhamun's mummy suggested that the boy king died of a lung disease or even a brain tumor. "This would explain the lump found on the back of his head," he said.

In 1968, when the new analysis was carried out on the mummy, it was suggested that Tutankhamun was hit on the head and murdered by either Aye or Horemhab. "But in my opinion this could not be the case," said Saleh "because Tutankhamun had no enemies; on the contrary, he was loved by the priests and the population because he re-established the state religion of Amun-Re after the religious revolution under Akhenaten, and re-opened all temples. Moreover," Salah added, "Aye and Horemhab would have had no reason to kill Tutankhamun because he was a youth and did not hold authority."

Madelen El-Mallakh, director general of Luxor Museum, commented on the traces of a blow to the head: "Who is to say for certain how it was administered, whether it was foul play or accidental," she said. "There is certainly an element of mystery surrounding Tut's death."

Bob Brier, an American Egyptologist, believes that Tutankhamun was indeed murdered, and claims he knows by whom. "It was either by his own personal attendant or by his cup-bearer. No-one could easily approach the back of the pharaoh unless it was part of his job to do so," he said. "The king's attendant and his cup-bearer would be the only people allowed to enter his bedroom without arousing suspicion." Brier added that he will back up his hypothesis with archaeological evidence which will be shown in his documentary, *The Great Pharaohs*.

Such contradictions raised by Egyptologists prompted the Antiquities and Travel Lovers' Committee (ATLC), an Egyptian non-profit organisation, to re-examine Tutankhamun's mummy and tomb and to carry out further research on the possible causes of his death.

The first step was a re-examination of the three tombs on the Theban necropolis belonging to Aye, Horemhab and Tutankhamun. The tomb and the treasure of the latter have revealed two pieces of literary evidence suggesting that Aye and Horemhab were innocent of murder.

The first is a papyrus document related to the "opening of the mouth ceremony," a ritual in which the dead man proclaims his innocence of any act he may have committed during his lifetime, or mentions any subject he wants to shed light on in preparation for the day of judgement. Tutankhamun's document indicated that Aye was innocent of his murder. Also, on the pedestal of one of Horemhab's statues is a text in which he left a message to all Egyptians, indicating that he was not the man who committed the crime. He declared in writing that he was loyal to his king and carried out all his orders faithfully. He also warned any Egyptian who may read the text, against 'normalising' relations with foreigners and told them never to trust them:

"Egyptian brothers, don't ever forget what foreigners did to our King Tutankhamun," Horemhab wrote.

Forensic examination carried out by Egyptian experts on Tutankhamun's mummy reveal that he was killed by poison and it is now suggested that the blow to the back of the head might have happened after his death, during mummification. "His body might have been dropped on the floor and his head hit the flagstones; there is no trace of bleeding around the blow," say experts.

Now another person is being accused of the murder: Tutu or Dudu, described first as an official in the court of Amenhotep III, later that of his son Akhenaten, and, later still, Tutankhamun. He was not an Egyptian and a person of a somewhat unsavoury character who caused friction in the royal household. One of the leaders of a vassel state in Tunib in Palestine reputedly used this man to divert the messages of the Egyptian contingents in the area, so their calls for help failed to reach Egypt, and no aid was given. When Akhenaton realised that he had been supplied with false evidence about the true situation of his troops abroad, he apparently announced that an investigation would be carried out forthwith to discover its source.

His death in mysterious circumstances followed and members of the ATLC suggest that it was Tutu who was responsible for the deaths of Akhenaten and Tutankhamun "because in the tomb of the latter, an object like a trotter was found on which graffiti invokes, 'go to the real killer and beat him and awake him from his death to confess and admit his crime so that the one who is now accused can be declared innocent." Since trotters were not ritual objects in Ancient Egypt it is suggested that it belonged to outsiders. "Therefore, as Tutu was a foreigner, the priests used the trotter to indicate the nationality of the murderer."

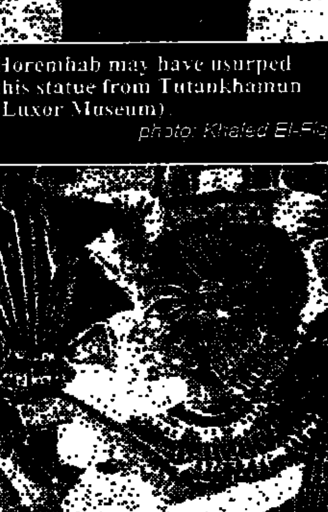
Mohamed El-Saghir, head of Upper Egyptian antiquities, added to the mystery. He claims that there is insufficient historical or archaeological evidence to suggest that either Aye or Horemhab were murderers, "but what is noteworthy is that Horemhab usurped some of Tutankhamun's treasure and affixed his name to it."

El-Saghir referred to the two statues on display in Luxor Museum which were found in the open court of Amenhotep III in Luxor Temple in 1989. These feature the king seated before the god Atum and the goddess Isis respectively. Beneath each are texts stating: 'Horemhab with gods' and El-Saghir points out that studies on both these statues reveal that they have the same physiognomy as Tutankhamun as well as evidence that the original texts were erased to inscribe the new ones. Analysis on the faint traces of the former show some parts of Tutankhamun's titles.

"And as for Aye," El-Saghir continues, "there is insufficient evidence that he is guilty. He was the high priest and was, moreover, the one who wrote Tutankhamun's negative confession and performed the 'opening of the mouth' ceremony".

While Tutankhamun's murder is so much in the news, it must not be forgotten that his wife, Ankhespaton, must not been entirely ruled out as a suspect. She was the one who dispatched a message to the Syrian monarch asking him to send one of his sons to marry her following the death of her husband because she was without a son to take care of her; she indicated that she could not marry one of her 'slaves.' Was she referring to Aye? Since there is evidence that Tutankhamun was murdered by poison, could she have been involved in a scheme with his cup-bearer?


Horemhab may have usurped this statue from Tutankhamun (Luxor Museum) photo: Khaled El-Fiqi


A young bride: adoring spouse or murderer?

This carved wood and gilded statue shows Tutankhamun in a papyrus boat in the act of throwing a harpoon. (Egyptian Museum)

The discoverer's museum

Seventy-five years ago, Howard Carter made one of the most remarkable archaeological discoveries of all time. Soon, he will have a museum dedicated to his life and work

Somewhere between the Valley of the Kings and the noblemen tombs on the west bank of Luxor, stands a large, domed, Nubian-style house, writes **Nevine El-Aref**. This is where the man who made one of the most remarkable archaeological finds of the century lived for two decades. This is where Howard Carter went home every night to pore over maps, catalogue finds and occasionally entertain the rich and powerful in the years that preceded his great find in 1922.

The Howard Carter house is now being turned into a museum which will give the public a glimpse of the life of the Briton whose excavations in the Valley of the Kings made him a celebrity. Mohamed El-Saghir, head of Upper Egyptian antiquities, says that the house has been restored from the outside by the Arab Contractors while workmen from the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) restored the inside walls and replaced damaged tiles.

The house is a single-storey affair. A long passage leads to five spacious rooms: two living rooms, a work area, a library and a bedroom. The latter has two ceiling lights designed like coloured palm trees. The house has a small bathroom, a kitchen with an traditional clay oven and a chimney.

There is also a contraption of three purple clay urns linked together by a small tap with a glass beneath. "This was Carter's way to purify drinking water," says *Amm* Hassan, the guard. At the far end of the kitchen there is an old-fashioned refrigerator with a wooden door decorated in Islamic designs.

Wooden trellises on the roof provide shade without obstructing the view of the small flower garden. A collection of photographs showing Carter at work at different stages of the discovery are on display.

Howard Carter was born in May 1874 in Swaffham in England, the youngest of 11 children. His father, Samuel John Carter worked for the *Illustrated London News*. At the age of 17, Carter was introduced to an English archaeologist who worked in the Middle Kingdom tombs at Beni Hassan. Starting out as a draftsman, copying the scenes and inscriptions in the tombs, Carter later gained valuable experience working under Sir Flinders Petrie at Deir El-Bahari. In 1899, Carter was appointed chief inspector of antiquities in Upper Egypt and supervised the excavations in the Valley of the Kings. In 1905, he was introduced to Lord Carnarvon who sponsored his excavations in the Theban necropolis in the years leading up to the discovery of the boy king's tomb.


photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

75 years of wonderment

Ever since the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in November 1922, the king and his treasures have dazzled the world. 75 years on, **Rehab Saad** retraces the steps that led to the find

"As he peered through the small hole, Carter was at first unable to distinguish specific objects, because the pale light cast off by the candle flickered constantly. But he soon realised that he was looking, not at wall paintings, but at three-dimensional objects — they appeared to be enormous gold bars stacked against the wall opposite the entrance. Dumbfounded, transfixed, he just stood there muttering: 'wonderful, marvellous, my God, wonderful!'"

The 75th anniversary of this remarkable event, the discovery of Tutankhamun's Tomb by Howard Carter, is coming up, and Egypt is getting ready to celebrate the find that still leaves all who see it, as Thomas Hoving writes in his book *Tutankhamun: the untold story*, transfixed. Special events in Luxor to mark the occasion are being organised, and one of the highlights will be the opening of the Howard Carter house on the west bank of the Nile, where the British archaeologist stayed during excavations in the Valley of the Kings. Situated not far from the tomb itself, a video will be screened at the house showing different stages of the discovery. The grandsons of Lord Carnarvon, patron and sponsor of Carter's expedition, will participate in the event.

Tutankhamun is undoubtedly one of the most famous rulers of Ancient Egypt, but as Howard Carter noted: "We might say with truth that the one outstanding feature of his life was that he died and was buried." More is known about him in death than in life, as his tomb was discovered nearly intact, with a breathtaking 5,000 items crammed inside, ranging from gilt chariots, couches and chairs to chests, statues, pottery, alabaster and gold.

The story of the discovery dates back to 1917, when Howard Carter, as monuments inspector, was supervising excavations begun by Theodore Davis, a rich American patron of archaeology who held the concession to excavate in the Valley of the Kings until 1914, making many notable discoveries. As soon as Davis relinquished the concession, Lord Carnarvon, who was working with Carter at the mortuary temple of Queen Hatshepsut in the Deir El-Bahri area, took over and became sponsor of the expedition for Carter.

For six fruitless seasons, Carter searched for the tomb of the young pharaoh. But in their last year, just as they were about to give up all hope of ever finding anything, as some worker's huts were being removed on the morning of 4 November 1922, an Egyptian worker came with good news: a tomb had been found.

On 6 November, Carter sent his historic cable to Lord Carnarvon telling him about the discovery, and on November 24 they went together with Lord Carnarvon's daughter to unseal the doors of the tomb — and the rest, quite literally, is history.

Ever since its discovery, people the world over have been fascinated by the the treasures of the young pharaoh, which still have an almost magnetic attraction for visitors to the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Encouraged by this global interest, officials decided to organise the famous exhibition "The Treasures of Tutankhamun," which travelled outside Egypt to Paris in 1967, the British Museum in 1972, to four cities in the Soviet Union in 1973, and to seven in the USA. When the 55 masterpieces chosen were at the National Gallery of Art in Washington DC, nearly a million visitors viewed them in 16 weeks, and the tour lasted for three years, encouraging the late Egyptologist Labib Habachi to comment: "Tutankhamun has been one of Egypt's greatest ambassadors!"

However, the tomb itself, like many others in the Theban necropolis, has been subjected to various forms of damage over the years. The Valley of the Kings is known to have suffered from floods and earthquakes, and more recently humidity and the effects of mass tourism are having a detrimental effect on the area.

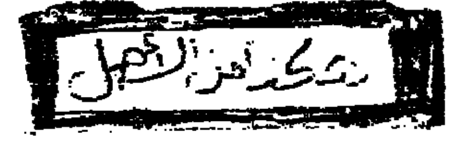
Concerned about the condition of the tomb, the Getty Institute devised a scheme in 1992 to save the tomb. And that same year, the Egyptian government announced a five-year project, with experts from the institute and in the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) spending up to 18 months studying the tomb's wall paintings and comparing their current state with photographs taken when the tomb was first opened. The next 18 months were to be spent treating the paintings to try to slow down the deterioration. The team would then continue to monitor the tomb, for perhaps a further two years, before any decision was made on whether to allow it to be opened to tourists.

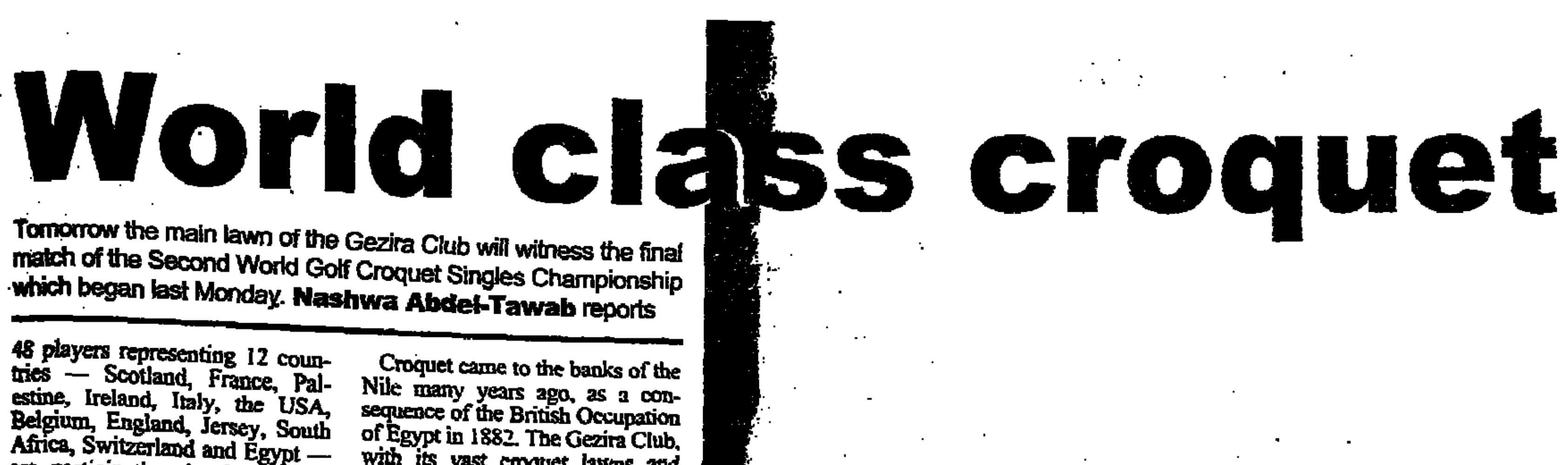
This five-year plan remained just that, a plan. The unique tomb "has been open to tourists from all over the world from 6am to 6pm," said Mohamed El-Saghir, head of antiquities in Upper Egypt, who believes that "the tomb does not need restoration; there is continual checking and inspection on the part of the SCA. Like other tombs in the valley, glass has been installed on the walls to prevent touching, and wooden floors have been installed to prevent dust from rising."

Some years ago a suggestion was made to build a replica of Tutankhamun's tomb on the necropolis, but after months of discussion at various levels, the idea was shelved, the argument being that tourists come all the way to Egypt to see the real thing, not a replica.

However, the tomb has been reconstructed a few kilometres south of Cairo in Dr Rageb's Pharaonic Village, complete with replicas of its contents, based on photographs and documentary evidence of the tomb as it was when first opened. The fascination and mystique that has surrounded the boy king for the last 75 years look set to continue well into the next millennium.


The tomb indicated that he was buried in a hurry





World class croquet



Tomorrow the main lawn of the Gezira Club will witness the final match of the Second World Golf Croquet Singles Championship which began last Monday. Nashwa Abdel-Tawab reports

48 players representing 12 countries — Scotland, France, Palestine, Ireland, Italy, the USA, Belgium, England, Jersey, South Africa, Switzerland and Egypt — are participating in the Second World Golf Croquet Singles Championship. The age of the players ranges from 17 to 66.

Last year, it was the Egyptians who won the First World Golf Croquet Championship in Milan, Italy, where they took the first three places, as well as seventh and eighth. It was as a result of this outstanding achievement that they were nominated to host this year's event.

The United States are expected to pose a particular threat to the reigning champions, since they have three Egyptians of American nationality playing for them.

The competition will be held over six lawns at the Gezira Club and the Gezira Youth Centre.

The Egyptian team will be made up of Khaled Younis, the title-holder, Hisham Abu Esbaa, last year's runner-up, Hani El-Shobki, Nahed Hassan, Ahmed Hamdi, Salah Hassan, Moheb Salib and Walid Salah.

Croquet came to the banks of the Nile many years ago, as a consequence of the British Occupation of Egypt in 1882. The Gezira Club, with its vast croquet lawns and golf courses, was chiefly established to cater for the needs of British citizens in Egypt. However, when the British left, the Egyptians did not take long to learn the rules of the game, and since their admission to the International Croquet Federation in 1994 they have dominated the sport.

In 1995, Egypt won the first ever international croquet competition, which was also held in Italy, taking the first three places, as if in preparation for the triumphant display that was to earn them the First World Championship.

There are two different kinds of croquet — association and golf croquet. The Egyptians play mainly golf croquet, but lately 28-year-old Walid Wahban of Sporting Club has been training for association croquet and will shortly be representing Egypt in the eighth World Association Croquet Championship to be held next month in Australia.

Pool of talent

Orteiga of Italy carried off the 8th International Heliopolis Water Polo Cup, while Russia romped home in the synchronised swimming. Inas Mazhar reports on the five-day event

There was a high spectator turnout for this year's water polo and synchronised swimming competition, despite its coinciding with the beginning of term for Egypt's schools and universities. The tournament was held at the Heliopolis Sporting Club, and many club members joined the fans to follow the exploits of the seven waterpolo teams and five synchro teams taking part.

The waterpolo section, played as a one-round league with the winner determined on points, was a tough test of the competitors' power and strength. The synchronised swimming competition was more complex in its organisation, being divided into solo, duet and team events.

The public were treated to some very high quality water polo, as well as to some wonderful routines from the synchro girls.

First-time participants Orteiga from Italy won the water polo event, beating Spartakus of Hungary 9-6 in a thrilling final. The Polish national team claimed third place, after beating Egypt's Maadi Club 13-6, in a game that was entirely dominated by the Poles.

The fourth place went to the host club, the Heliopolis team, who beat Sicily 13-10.

The championship's technical committee selected Claudio Paulo of the Orteiga Club as best goalkeeper in the tournament. Team Captain Enri Toss of Spartakus was top scorer with a total of 28 goals in the course of the tournament. His team-mate, Atilla Ordigia, was named best player in the championship for his all-round distinguished performance.

The synchronised swimming event was if anything even more entertaining than the water polo. The spectators enjoyed watching the girls perform their routines to the accompaniment of carefully chosen musical selections. The Egyptians (represented by two teams — the seniors and the under-12s) used a mixture of Oriental and Western music, which soon had the audience up clapping and dancing, and contrasted nicely with the exclusively western classic music used by the teams from Belgium, Russia and Greece.

The Russians are well-known for their excellence in watersports, so it came as no surprise that they dominated all three events in the synchro competition. Elena Soya was awarded the solo title for a perfect routine, which amazed both the referees and the spectators. Egypt's Marwa Tarek of the Heliopolis Club came second, while the third place went to the Greek Stela Ornaki.

In the duet event, it was the Russians again who walked off with the gold medal, and again, second place went to Egypt, represented by Rania Kamal and Marwa Tarek, and third place to the Greeks.

Though they only had four girls in the competition, Russia won the team event as well, with a top-class technical routine. This time, however, it was the turn of Greece to take the silver medal, while the hosts, Heliopolis Club, were awarded the bronze, to wild applause from the club members. However, thanks to the large number of members participating, the Heliopolis Club were placed first in the competition as a whole, as they had picked up the most points overall.

The beautiful game?

As the deadlock between power-house club Zamalek and their star player Khaled El-Ghandur continues, Eman Abdel-Moeti asks: is the problem just bad management, or is there something wrong with the system?







Ever since Egyptian football became a professional game, clubs have frequently found themselves in conflict with their star players. Sometimes the problem has been money, sometimes other matters, but there is a general sense that the introduction of money into the game has brought about a true, though still unresolved, shift in power. It has encouraged star players to feel that it is the club who needs them, and not the other way around.

Not that the clubs have not tried to profit from the new situation. They now claim a percentage of any transfer fee paid to a player. But at the same time, they continue to try and exploit the player's sense of belonging, in order to get the best out of him and prevent him leaving at the first good offer.

The result is a great deal of friction, not to say strife. Over the past few seasons, many star players have had problems with their clubs, because of their demands to be treated differently. And in each case the outcome has been the same: the situation escalates and dialogue turns into deadlock. The player quits, and the club loses.

Maybe compromise is not a virtue in a competitive sport, but it's certainly a quality on which Egyptian football seems to be conspicuously short. The recent confrontation between Zamalek's star player Khaled El-Ghandur and his club is a case in point, and may prove to be a turning point in the relations between clubs and their players. Here for once, unless both parties show some ability to compromise, they both stand to lose a lot. It is also a conflict on a hitherto unprecedented scale: no player has ever before refused to take part in a match in protest at the attitude of his club's management. Nor has a club ever punished a player by banning him from playing and even from training with his team. Many feel that Zamalek has been forced into this radical course of action by Ghandur's pig-headedness, but their decision has had negative repercussions for the club as well as for the player.

Ghandur told the *Weekly* that his coach, Rud Crol, had treated him with contempt because he believed — wrongly — that Ghandur had complained to the press about training conditions. He said: "Crol did not include me in the last training session which should have included everyone in the team that was to go and play in Ghana against Goldfield. It was a clear signal that I would not be playing, so I did not travel with them." He added: "Then, when they returned defeated, Crol said it was my fault because I had not joined the team. So the management decided to suspend me and sell me to another club."

Perhaps such a harsh decision is the best way to teach young, talented yet temperamental players to obey their coach. Yet it came only two weeks before the Egyptian season kicked off — after the deadline for professional players wishing to move to European clubs. Indeed, there is no way now Zamalek could hope to sell Ghandur, even to another Arab club. The only offer they have had was from local club Sharqiya, who offered LE400,000 for a two-year contract. According to Ghandur, Zamalek turned the offer down, as they had expected to be able to sell him for a million pounds. Yet he admitted that he himself would have turned the offer down if the club had approved it, because he didn't want to "play with an underdog club, after being a star with a power-house club like Zamalek." So Ghandur would seem to be caught in a trap. He cannot move to another club even if he wants to, and Zamalek cannot bring him back into the team, because he has to be punished in some way or other. Zamalek are left without one of their best players, and the player himself is forced to sit on the sidelines and twiddle his thumbs.

Ghandur has also refused to follow the example of his team-mate Ashraf Kassem and take the matter to FIFA, even though he is adamant FIFA would vindicate him: "It would be a simple matter of who violated the contract first, and that would be Zamalek, because they have held back part of my salary for ten months now." But others interpret his reluctance as fear that Zamalek will accuse him of gross disloyalty to the club and that this will tarnish his image with his fans. According to Ghandur, "in a professional system, players' loyalty should not be questioned and it should not be an issue. But if players are asked to be loyal and dedicated to their clubs, then their clubs should not humiliate them and their coaches should not belittle them."

The whole story has been a cause of much anxiety to other players and to other clubs. Is there something wrong with the system that now runs football in Egypt, of which Zamalek is only a particularly striking illustation? Or is Zamalek the victim of its own peculiarly inept management? The club has certainly acquired a reputation for spending millions of pounds each year on new players — and new coaches — then getting rid of them when they fail to win any silverware. Many say this only frustrates the players and creates problems, and that that is why Zamalek has failed to win the league for four seasons now. But it also seems to be unable to do its dirty washing in private — and as a result, arguments once picked up by the press are rapidly inflated beyond the point where they could be saved by negotiation.

But the Ghandur incident also reveals a flaw at the heart of Egyptian football, beyond the management problems of any particular club. There is a serious confusion that must be resolved between the professional player, who should not be expected to be loyal to a particular club, and the amateur player, who plays out of loyalty to his club, and for no other reason. In addition, the existing contractual relationship between professional players and their clubs is not only unfair on both parties, but does not stipulate precisely their rights and obligations towards each other. As a result, it is inevitable that both parties end up trying to manipulate the imprecisions to their own advantage. It is surely now time that not only Zamalek, but Egyptian football as a whole, resolve this problem once and for all, before it is able to damage its reputation any further.

A bit of a squash

CHANGES are afoot in the world of squash and Egypt is part of the transformation. **Eman Abdel-Moeti** reports.

Only five years ago, Egyptian squash players might have participated in World Team Championships, but they were never really a threat to the top dogs — the English, Australians and Pakistanis who monopolised the prizes and awards for a very long time. In those days, Egypt had hosted only one international championship, and even then none of the top ten players in the world attended. But since Barada led the Egyptian junior national team to first place in the 1994 World Championships, where he also won the individual title, followed by his team-mate Omar El-Brollossy in second place, Egypt's status on the squash circuit has been totally transformed. Today, the country hosts at least three international championships, including the famous Al-Ahram Championship and two World Championships, and star squash players queue up to compete in them.

Recently the Squash Federation under its new president Hossam Nasser set themselves the challenge of organising the first Egyptian International Championship which, with total prize money of $100,000, will be second only to the Al-Ahram. They also chose an unusual but striking venue: Alexandria, and decided to make use of the famous portable glass court which drew so much attention at the Al-Ahram Championship. They have even gone so far as to build a reproduction Greco-Roman temple as an entrance hall leading to the court. With such a magnificent site, so different from the standard venues in the capital, they have been able to guarantee the participation of the world's greatest squash stars, as well as a huge number of spectators.

But there is more to the changes that are at work in squash today than money and popular recognition. New faces have begun to emerge to replace the established stars of the sport. Indeed the top ten ranked players in the world are all new to these giddy heights. Ten times world-title-holder Jansher Khan of Pakistan, who seemed to have vowed to remain on the squash throne for as long as he could, has told the *Weekly* that he will not be taking part in the World Open Championship in Malaysia in November for "personal reasons." Khan has recently had a couple of upsets, losing in two competitions to Scotland's Peter Nicol, currently ranked third in the world, and again in the final of the Al-Ahram — something he would never have allowed to happen before. At the same time, former world-ranked 36 Jonathan Power suddenly jumped to fourth place last year, while Egypt's Ahmed Barada leaped from 11th place to sixth. On the other hand, Australia's Rodney Eyles, who was beaten twice by Barada, seems to be losing his pose. Eyles was also beaten by England's Peter Marshall in both the Hong Kong Open and the US Open.

More than 1000 spectators attended the first two rounds of the Egyptian Open in Alexandria from 10-17 October. At least a dozen Egyptian players entered the two-day qualifying rounds to play against the pros, some to improve their skills, and some, like Ahmed Faizy, former world junior champion, Amr Shabana and Karim El-Mistikawi, in order to better their world ranking. Egypt's Omar El-Brollossy, Barada, and Amir Wagih have already qualified for the main draw on Tuesday.

So far, the Championship has seen a few surprises, though the final may be less unpredictable. But Rodney Eyles's 3-2 defeat at the hands of South African Craig Wapnick, world ranked 38, certainly raised a few eyebrows. Another surprise was world ranked 7 Chris Walker losing 3-2 to his fellow countryman Nick Taylor in the first round. Peter Nicol still seems determined to succeed to the mantle of Khan as the undisputed king of squash. Egypt's Barada may have the same dream, but he has hitherto lacked Nicol's patience and endurance, and may have to settle for second best, at least in the immediate future. Yet who knows? If they both make it to the finals, the Open may have one more surprise in store for us yet...

Tennis anniversary

LAST Monday saw the opening of the 75th Egypt International Tennis Championship — Mena 97 — which brings together a large number of tennis stars with good international rankings. The finals will take place on Sunday at the Gezira Club.

The presence of such players as Alberto Berasategui, ranked 24, Javier Sanchez, ranked 36, Karim Alami from Morocco, ranked 52, the Romanian Dinu Pescariu, ranked 82, Gilbert Scraller, ranked 92, the Italian David Sanguinetti, ranked 93, Jerome Golmard, ranked 112 and Francisco Roig, ranked 113, are sure to make for a tough championship.

Last year Berasategui only made runner-up, so fierce was the competition, and this has given the championship a good reputation within the sport.

Only two Egyptians with wild cards are playing in the main draw, the seven other Egyptians having been eliminated early on in the preliminary matches.

Ismailia back and forth

THE SPANIARD David Medina, who last week came second in the Nile Swimming Marathon, has gone on to win the 10th Suez Canal Swimming Marathon in Ismailia.

First in a field of 25, Medina completed the 16km course in 3 hours 22 minutes and 26 seconds. He carried off total prize money of LE4,000 and $300 donated by Kamal El-Mandour, a businessman with a passion for the sport.

Igor Majcen from Slovenia was placed second, one minute after Medina, followed by Frac Malaa from Syria. Frac's cousin, Lobna Malaa, came first in the women's event, ahead of Rodina Malaa and Reham Hani Moustafa.

Eubank no more

WELSHMAN Joe Calzaghe continued his unbeaten run to win the vacant World Boxing Organisation (WBO) super-middleweight title last Sunday when he beat England's Chris Eubank unanimously on points over twelve rounds.

Eubank got off to a nightmare start in his 23rd world title fight when he was floored just a few seconds into the first round, Calzaghe, a southpaw, catching him flush on the jaw with a left hook.

The judges scored the fight 118-109, 116-111 and 118-111 to Calzaghe.

Eubank had not taken part in a serious fight for two years and his timing was clearly off. He had also had to battle in the days leading up to the encounter just to make the weight.

Lefts and rights

NASEEM Hamed pounded out a seventh-round stoppage victory over Jose Badillo last week to hold on to his WBO featherweight title for the eighth time.

The unbeaten British fighter, who is hoping to make a splash in the United States by beating Kevin Kelley at Madison Square Garden later this year, cut the Puerto Rican challenger above the left eye and below the right, and then drew blood from his nose, in a one-sided encounter at Sheffield Arena. With Hamed unloading lefts and rights, Badillo's corner stopped the fight at 1:37 of round seven.

It was only Badillo's second loss in 22 fights, but it looked to be on the cards from the very first seconds. Using the jab to great effect, the left-handed Hamed damaged Badillo around the eyes early on, and apart from getting through with a left and right in the sixth, the Puerto Rican rarely hit the target.

It was Hamed's 27th win and, at age 23, he has plenty of time to collect more titles and move up the weights.

Anti-racism

MORE than 50 soccer players, including such stars as Frenchman Eric Cantona, Mexican Hugo Sanchez and Liberian George Weah, came together for a three-team tournament last week as part of the European Union's Year Against Racism.

Playing before some 50,000 spectators at Real Madrid's Santiago Bernabeu Stadium, Hugo Sanchez's squad of international players defeated the other two teams, captained by Cantona and Nigerian striker Mutiu Adepjou, respectively, to win the exhibition tournament.

Some 20 veteran soccer stars such as Ferenc Puskas, Eusebio and Alfredo Di Stefano also attended the tournament which was aimed at promoting awareness of the need to combat racism.

"If we play together as one team, we can score against racism," said the president of the European Parliament, Jose Maria Gil Robles, in his pre-match speech.

Star attraction Diego Maradona dropped out of the competition earlier in the week after unspecified problems with the organisers. Brazilian ace Romario was also unable to participate, as he is presently recovering from a leg injury.

The match was organised in conjunction with the International Association of Professional Soccer Players (AIFP) and the Canal Clus Espana pay TV channel.

Disposable coaches

SAUDI Arabia has fired its national soccer coach, Tilo Vingada from Portugal, making him the seventh coach to be sacked in the last three years. Vingada will be replaced by Germany's Otto Pfister.

The decision was taken after a World Cup qualifying match in Riyadh last week in which Saudi Arabia beat Qatar 1-0. The Saudi Arabian Football Association had expected a substantially better result.

Under Vingada, the team's performance had been highly erratic, and it was felt that he was failing to realise the full potential of the Saudi players.

Three-time Asian Cup champions Saudi Arabia became the only Gulf Arab nation ever to reach the second round at the 1994 World Cup in Atlanta. Since then, the Saudis have been through seven coaches.

Pfister comes to Saudi Arabia from Bangladesh, where he was coaching the national team. Vingada had replaced Brazil's Jose Ze Mario, who was sacked in October 1995 after the Saudis finished third in the six-nation Gulf Cup two years ago.

Al-Ahram Weekly

Ahmed Zaki:

"Success means knowing when to say 'no'. It's about learning to say 'no' at the right time. This was the beginning for me"



photo: Hossam Diab

In the negative

"'No' was the first thing in my life. It grew louder in proportion to the extent of all my ambitions, of my anger, my rebellion, the taste of the first years of my life, like a long dark night."

Ahmed Zaki has just begun.

On 8 November 1949, Ahmed Zaki Abdel-Rahman Badawi was born into a very average provincial family in Zagazig. He later shortened the unwieldy name. Years added more sadness and perplexity to his eyes, and writers fought to add ever more over-the-top descriptions to the already hyperbolic list: the dark premier, the black tiger, the rebel, the lover, the madman, the adventurer, the artist...

Born a Scorpio, he is a fighter, obstinate, intelligent, candid, extreme, strong, charismatic, attractive, charming, loves a challenge, loves to talk, self-confident, sharp-eyed, capable of confrontation, moody, often disheveled, idealistic, hates money, generous.

It's all in the stars.

Back to the beginning again.

The distance between Zagazig and Cairo is the first 'no'. It is the distance between childhood grief and his later estrangement, a child's hopes and a man's ambitions, life on the right side of the scales, or survival.

A long journey: "A few months after I was born, my father died. As I grew older, I realised that I knew nothing about him. It was as though he had died before I was born. Yet I felt a great need for him, particularly during those early years of my childhood, when my mother married another man. Here was a man I didn't know. A stranger had come into her life and mine, and he became my step-father. For the first time, I knew the meaning of sadness and pain. It was then that I had to leave my father's home, where my mother had been married. I took my only pair of shorts and the single toy I owned, both orphans, like me, and I went to live with my grandmother. The moment of forced departure from my mother's embrace, breaking away from arms that were about to enfold someone else... That was unspeakably painful. Grandmother was kind and tender-hearted, but she was never able to teach me to forget the bitterness of that moment. To this moment, the memories remain, burning at my nerves.

"With my father's death, I had become an orphan. I was robbed of my mother, and my childhood was uprooted, stripped off me. I said 'no' for the first time then: 'No' to the injustice of it, 'no' to my grandmother's pity, 'no' to the commiseration that chased me everywhere I went. I didn't want a life of weakness. It was killing me. There was no meaning to the kind words they whispered, and I could sense their emptiness. Words are just combinations of letters that convey no love or hate. They were a duty, uttered in charity."

Ahmed Zaki's memories are still teaching him how to be himself, how to evoke sadness when he wants it to come to the surface, how to cherish happiness, no matter how small the dose.

The July 1952 Revolution took place during his early childhood. Zaki was just beginning to learn how to read and write. The school was 15km away from his grandmother's house. He walked that distance at dawn each morning with the happiness of someone who has found, at last, something different and special in his life. He had refused to go to school before. The dire poverty in which they lived was more than a child could bear. It made the idea of an education risible. He had been unable to find any sense in learning to read or write, or in walking all that way to school, lugging his bag of books. When he finally ventured to go, he found children different from the friends from his alley with whom he had been playing for years. There were father figures too, men who taught him and seemed concerned for his welfare. He wanted to venture deeper into this new-found world, to find out more about the wonderful sense of responsibility he had begun to discover. He felt responsible for his studies, his class-mates, guarding the school premises, and for the sports activities. His fear of losing them, perhaps, led to a fierce desire to hold on to them himself.

"By learning how to love my school, I regained my capacity for life. All I owned were a few piastres, a pair of shorts and one shirt. I replaced them whenever I outgrew them. But I had a big dream, and perseverance. I still said no to those who wanted to help me. The cruelest moments of my existence were those when someone tried to give me a hand-out, a pound or so, on which to live. Smiling painfully, I would refuse, pretending I had enough money. In fact, I hadn't a single piastre to spend at school, or buy a piece of bread." The constant awareness of his poverty, the precarity of life, pushed him on.

Ahmed Zaki seems confused in this different world. He looks at you as if he could ask you a question, or throw a punch. He's ready to fight for his convictions to the last breath. He loves change, and always wants to stand out. But he pulls the rug out from under critics, because he always gets there before them, accusing himself of his own mistakes. No self-recrimination: he forgives himself as willingly as he does others. But he is no simpleton.

Zaki has led his own life, with little childhood to speak of, no warmth, not much family or security. His poetry gave him different tastes, and made him the artist that he is. His impetuosity stems from deprivation, and his dreams from his suffering.

He is a bit of a sailor, always on the look-out for a shore on which to land, for stability, for roots in a soil on which he cannot seem to leave footprints. Years of limelight and fame have made him neither a spendthrift nor a miser. The money is there, he spends it. That is all.

In the mid-sixties, he entered the industrial school in Zagazig. Industry, factory workers, iron smelters, and "the hands that create guns from brass and lead" were national heroes then. Ahmed Zaki loved Abdel-Nasser and his speeches, Abdel-Halim's songs, and Salah Jahin's poems.

His on-screen interpretation of Abdel-Nasser changed Zaki's ambitions altogether. Now, no longer content to live on the memory of Abdel-Halim Hafez's lyrics, Zaki is making a film about him. He will play the leading role.

It was Salah Jahin who discovered Ahmed Zaki. He became Jahin's protégé. Jahin gave him advice, wiped his tears, and pushed him forward, when he was about to fall back, "into the darkness".

The '60s, years of anger. A slight, dark-skinned youth, fresh from Zagazig, a vocational school certificate in his hand, proficient with a drill, but bewitched by acting. "My school principal was a great man and an artist. He loved the theatre, and created a troupe which presented 12 plays each year. I acted in more than 30 throughout my school years. I directed one play that was seen by a committee from Cairo. The members applauded and encouraged me to carry on with my studies in Cairo at the Institute of Performing Arts." The journey began. He presented his file to the Institute, but trembled when he saw the crowds of candidates waiting to be tested, especially when he learned that each one of those applicants had been "recommended" by some important personality. Only he had no such recommendation. He sat the examination, then overheard one of the office messengers telling a colleague that a peasant boy from Sharqiya had been admitted to the Institute.

"I found my name on the list of those who had passed. Elated, I spent the evening wandering in the streets of Cairo, gazing at the glittering lights, staring open-mouthed at the billboards."

Doubtless, the years that followed answered the questions he would not have spoken.

Bird On the Road, House-Boat 70, The Innocent, An Important Man's Wife, Black Tiger, Detention Cell, The Beginning, Love on Pyramids Plateau, The Orphan Sa'ad, The Addict, The Prince, The Emperor, Nasser '56... In 35 years, he has become one of the most important figures in an industry known for its adulation of the truly big names. He has redefined the concept of stardom for cinema-goers and box-office watchers alike. The producers of his generation — Khairi Bishara, Mohamed Khan, Atef El-Tayeb, Raafat El-Mihi, Ali Abdel-Khaleq, Dawoud Abdel-Sayed, Samir Seif — re-shaped Egyptian cinema. They formulated new sentiments. Ahmed Zaki acted these new emotions out.

It was no joy-ride.

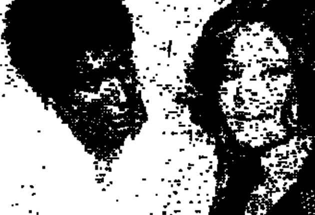
"The problem began while I was at the Institute. Where was I to live in this big strange city? And on what money, when I had no work? For a year, I lived with a relative. It was a year of torment for me, due to my over-sensitivity, and the feeling that I was a burden to my hosts. Then I met 'Uncle Salah [Jahin]'. It was the end of my first year at the Institute. I was playing a small role in one of his plays in verse, called *Cairo in a Thousand Years*. It was such a small role that you could hardly see me, but he noticed me. He took me in. We never parted after that, until he died. He taught me about life, dispelled my sorrow, told me about history. I was less lonely. He found me work and introduced me to many people. He told me: 'Never let go of the sadness in your eyes. But don't let it rob you of your joy'."

Offers started to come his way. There were small roles, at first: *Hello, Shalabi; School for Delinquents; The Children Have Grown Up*. Fame found its way to Ahmed Zaki. He moved into a boarding-house, then a furnished flat.

















Top, from left:
Nasser '56; Life Is but an Instant; The Star **(soon to be released);**
bottom, from left:
The Noble Doorkeeper; Mister Karate; The Beginning; Behind the Sun

El-Karnak, one of the most important motion-pictures of the '70s, came next. His name was mooted for the male lead, opposite Soad Hosni. He was overjoyed by the prospect of a big break. But the foreign distributor refused. Zaki was not yet known to the public in the Arab world, and Nour El-Sherif got the part.

The years that followed overcame the distributors' reluctance. This young man, so different from the Turkish-type jeunes premiers, took over the traditional version of the young film star, changing it, himself, and cinema in Egypt.

He is nearing fifty, but you wouldn't know it. What will he do next? He's afraid of time running out on him. He loves music, the sea, autumn, laughing. He aspires to create his own autobiography, in which he can then live comfortably.

But he is killing himself. Hundreds of cigarettes, cups of coffee the doctor prohibited, his nihilistic involvement in his characters.

Doctors have warned him. They have given him the choice between his health and his work. They have told him that he must retire. Ahmed Zaki, ever the optimist, always obstinate, smiled and gave the usual answer. "No. I'd rather die."

Profile by ***Youssri El-Fakharani***

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris



(l-r) Assy, Maged, De Goede, Mona; (l-r)Ragheb, Zaki, Vandiver, Shoeb, Ghoneim, Mrs Vandiver, Cardenas

♥ Well, dears, I have to confess that this last week the old alma mater has surpassed itself, doing us, its children, from near and far (time-wise, that is) immensely proud.

One of the momentous events it has organised, quite successfully, I may add, was our great artist **Sabri Ragheb**'s exhibition, entitled *The Master and His Students*, which I would not have missed for the world, not only for the fascinating works that were being presented, but for the chance little frivolous me was given to chat artistically with old friends. There I was, dears, happily talking my head off with **Nagwa Shoeb**, AUC director of public relations, and Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs at the Ministry of Culture **Mohamed Ghoneim**, who was deputising on this occasion for our minister of culture, **Farouk Hosni**. I had the great pleasure of being introduced to **Dr Frank Vandiver**, acting president of AUC, and his charming wife, before we were joined by my dear **Mona Zaki**, AUC associate public relations director in charge of cultural events, the artist himself, and Mexican Ambassador to Egypt **Hector Cardenas**, who was there in his capacity as student of the master.

♠ The other much-anticipated event was **Maged Farag**'s reception, at which he presented his latest work, entitled *1952, The Last Protocol*. The last protocol it may well be, but it is definitely not **Maged**'s last luxurious tome. Actually, there is another one in preparation right now, but this is a secret which so far **Maged** has only shared with his lovely wife **Assy**, his good friends **Justus de Goede**, South Africa's ambassador in Egypt and AUC's lovely **Mona Zaki**, and yours truly, of course.

